



The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Testimony from Katherine Howell, Director, Workforce Partnerships, Educate Maine

In Support Of

L.D. 1389
An Act to Establish a Mobile Learning Lab

11 April 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Katherine Howell, Director of Workforce Partnerships at Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of L.D. 1389, An Act to Establish a Mobile Learning Lab.

Educate Maine is focused on increasing college and career readiness and advancing educational attainment for Maine people. Founded in 2011, we believe all students and adults should have the skills necessary to thrive in postsecondary education and in the workforce. Our strength lies in our ability to work with K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and employers to help solve education and workforce development challenges.

Since 2020, the global pandemic has demonstrated the value of the bioscience industry. Not only has it been at the forefront of addressing the pandemic, but US bioscience has been growing, generating high paying and high-quality jobs for individuals at all levels – from non-degree holders to the most specialized life sciences degrees. Recognizing that Maine is at an economic crossroads, the Maine Economic Development Strategy (2020-2029) calls for diversification of Maine’s heritage industries. Maine has an opportunity to create a robust life sciences industry but to do so, we need to deliberately cultivate a bioscience network and develop career pathways for future talent. This starts with investing in our students in the Pre-K-12 system.

Maine’s educators and schools have a limited number of resources and tools available to them to make this happen. For rural schools this can be especially true. A mobile learning lab, like the one proposed in this bill would allow for cutting edge technology to be delivered to the doorstep of rural and under-resourced schools allowing students to access experiences beyond what many schools can provide on their own. This capital investment would reach dozens of schools a year and allow thousands of students to engage with new equipment, hands-on learning, and innovative lessons.

The concept of a mobile learning lab is new to Maine but not the United States. In July 2022 I had the opportunity to attend the Mobile Laboratory Coalition Conference which brought together educators, businesses, and mobile lab leaders to discuss the impact and future

innovations of mobile labs. I left there knowing that Maine needed to bring this unique opportunity to our schools. In recent years, states from Maryland to Texas have invested in mobile learning labs that have driven high student engagement, support from teachers, and community excitement.

Educate Maine is already working toward making this a reality in our state in collaboration with Learning Undefeated, a leader in Mobile STEM education, Northeastern's Roux Institute and Bioscience Association of Maine. We have recently been awarded congressionally delegated funds through Maine's federal delegation to begin designing and building a mobile lab set to deploy to schools in early 2024. Should this bill be passed, Educate Maine would be well positioned to respond to an RFP with the Maine Department of Education to partner on this lab. Available funds would accelerate deployment and enable collaboration with the Department to ensure learning opportunities will be supplemental and complementary to what is currently offered to learners in our public schools. Focus groups of Maine's teachers, alongside local industry employers and scientists, will co-create curriculum that aligns with the Science and Technology standards and the Life and Career Ready standards in the Maine Learning Results.

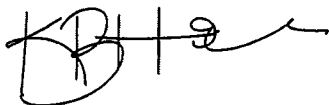
This type of innovative and collaborative program will leverage the strengths of Maine's life science industry to create a unique opportunity for Maine students to learn about on-ramps to meaningful, in-demand careers that allow them to live, study, and work in Maine. This bill will efficiently invest in our future workforce, maximizing the student experience by sharing high dollar equipment across the state. I encourage you to pass this bill in support of Maine's students.

Resources:

2022 Mobile Laboratory Coalition Conference Report:

https://www.mobilelabcoalition.com/files/ugd/77ed8a_a2e68eaa41a54955a12e803b61f00484.pdf

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Howell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Katherine Howell
Director, Workforce Development
Educate Maine