

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and distinguished members of the Joint Select Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

Good morning. My name is Cory P. Johnson, Ph.D. and I am a postdoctoral researcher at the MDI Biological Laboratory. I am testifying today in support of LD416.

I am a Maine native. Prior to my career in scientific research, I made my living as a Registered Maine Sea Kayak Guide in Midcoast Maine and as a professional ski instructor in Breckenridge, Colorado. However, during the summer of 2015 I realized that my favorite aspect of outdoor education was the opportunity to relay interesting scientific facts to the public. It was then that I made the decision to stay in Maine and pursue my bachelor's degree in biology.

I attended the University of Maine where I met my first research mentor (Prof. Kristy Townsend) and conducted research on obesity and diabetes. I was not only fascinated by the research itself but was enamored by the access I had as an undergraduate student to conduct impactful research in my home state. My research experience with Prof. Townsend kickstarted my interest in a career in the biomedical sciences and I was excited about the prospect of contributing to my home community. I then attended graduate school at the University of Maine, where I researched how cells respond to their environment at a molecular level with Prof. Joshua Kelley.

During my doctoral studies I made many connections with researchers across the state of Maine and beyond. So, at the end of graduate school, I interviewed with researchers at University of California San Francisco, University of California San Diego, and Scripps Research Institute in Jupiter, Florida. All prestigious institutions. I was excited about these potential opportunities, though I knew that I would miss the incredible quality of life we enjoy in Maine.

During this period of interviews, I took a course at the MDI Biological Laboratory. There, I met who would soon become my current mentor, Prof. Hermann Haller. In graduate school, I had dreamed of a time that I could establish my career in Maine, but I believed (as many other graduate students believe) that this is only possible by fleeing to places like Boston or San Francisco, well-known and respected hubs of biomedical and biotech research and development. However, after conversations with Prof. Haller at MDI Biological Laboratory and Prof. Aileen Huang-Saad at the Roux Institute, I realized that I not only had a pathway to establish a career in Maine, but that I would also be at the cutting-edge of research – I currently use human stem cell derived organoids as a model system to

investigate kidney disease. This was encouraging and I decided to take this opportunity here in Maine to follow my dream.

In summary, Maine is a growing hub for research and development in the northeast and is evidenced by the recent boom in biotechnology including MDI Bioscience, Marin Skincare, and IDEXX. Additionally, there are many more students than me who are interested in research careers here in Maine. LD416 will provide the infrastructure necessary to facilitate the growing interest in research and development in the state of Maine and that supporting LD416 will ensure a vibrant future for Maine and it's residents. Therefore, I urge you to vote yes on LD416.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony and I welcome any questions you may have.