

Testimony of Shane Flynn to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, supporting LD 2231

Chairs Rafferty and Brennan and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs thank you for facilitating this important Public Hearing on LD 2231.

"The people of the Midcoast region have embraced the Hutchinson Center since the beginning, making it a vital, dynamic institution that effectively serves its unique mission. The sense of community that exemplifies the University of Maine is readily apparent in what we see happening every day in Belfast, and that makes all of us associated with the Hutchinson Center and the university very proud.

My thanks go to all who have worked so hard to make this expansion possible. It is a landmark achievement for the Hutchinson Center and the University of Maine"

These are the words of the then President of UMaine, Bob Kennedy in a letter published in the Republican Journal on October 1 2009. The letter was addressed to the community as "Dear Friends" and also included the following passage, "I am struck by the outpouring of community support, which began long before we opened the Hutchinson Center doors, and continues unabated today"

Dr. Kennedy was referring specifically to the fundraising effort by the community which was a critical component to ensure the expansion of the center in 2009. Dr. Kennedy understood that the center had grown well beyond the vision of Charlie Cawley or Fred Hutchinson or those of us who were involved on a daily basis to raise funds, pore over plans, oversee construction or focus on enrollment. In the early days, skeptics may have expected that MBNA personnel would dominate enrollment ... I did. By 2005, of the 1,100 people enrolled in the Hutchinson Center, only 15% were MBNA people. The people of midcoast had, by 2009 made the Hutchinson Center, theirs as had always been the plan. Midcoast people attended the center and between them and MBNA and the contributions of MBNA people paid approximately 80% of the capital costs of the center that sits on Route 3 today.

Those of you on this committee and others who are not as close to the question of the future of the Hutchinson Center can deservedly ask, "why should a fiscally challenged university not be allowed to dispose of this and other assets as they see fit?" The question is fair and in other circumstances one that many of us testifying here today could support but the Hutchinson Center's history is not similar to the Houlton Center or other targeted assets. From it's inception MBNA intended the Hutchinson Center to be a gift to the community and not the university. MBNA had and continued to support other university initiatives across the spectrum BUT had not gifted the Hutchinson Center to the university from the outset because the center was a gift to the community in which the university offered programming. From the first days of the center, much was made of the public spaces in the building and they were utilized for non-university meetings/activities.

When MBNA was acquired by Bank of America, faced with community uncertainty about the Bank's plans for the midcoast, Bank of America wished to demonstrate its good intentions and gifted the Hutchinson Center to the university. While a noble gesture, what Bank of America didn't understand was the history noted above. As long as educational offerings flourished, locals continued to fully support the center but now the community stares at a situation where the university has not, in any meaningful way engaged with the community to find a mutually beneficial means to transfer ownership to Belfast.

As we meet, the midcoast community finds itself in a very difficult situation, the university has not engaged respectfully even as we have made countless efforts in private to connect. University actions to date greatly disappoint, in November 2019 the university published its "Strategic Vision

and Values". A section of one of the three goals, 2.3.1. reads "we will develop an organizational structure that supports coordinated communication with internal and external stakeholders" The community clearly is not seen as a worthy "stakeholder" . We submitted a response to the university's RFP and met the initial submission date, which without request was extended. The university is now poised to make a determination on responses to an entirely opaque RFP process, responses will be assessed by people of the university's choosing where the clearly expressed wishes of more than 1,200 community members are being ignored. Community members, many who have contributed significant donations want to assist the university transition from ownership of the center and return it to where it was intended from 1999 and where it rightly belongs. We ask that this committee vote to support LD 2231.