

RE: Public Hearing LD 2231

March 6, 2024

Submitted by Michael Hurley

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Chair and Senator Rafferty and Chair and Representative Brennan and the distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

I am Michael Hurley. I served as Mayor of Belfast from 2000-2008 and as City Councilor from 2009 to 2023. I was elected to ten terms. Go anywhere in the state of Maine and when local Belfast citizens mention they are from Belfast the common refrain is “we love Belfast!” Belfast is recognized statewide for our healthy economy and our vibrant and welcoming small city. **It was not always so.**

Those who know Maine and Belfast’s history will remember we were a bare knuckle and pretty rough chicken growing and processing city, we packed sardines, cooked and packaged potatoes and more. Our waterfront was a working industrial zone that boaters and tourists avoided. With the arrival of MBNA everything changed for Belfast. Thousands of good paying jobs lifted many thousands of Mainers from low paying occupations just after the sardines and chickens had gone away. MBNA did not just believe in extracting and profiting from their employees and the area. They poured support into Belfast and Maine.

MBNA with the leadership of Charles Cawley was extraordinarily generous to Belfast and every corner of Maine supporting education, land preservation, libraries and causes and people too numerous to mention. MBNA left a transformed Maine as their legacy. Extraordinary is the only accurate description.

As a new Mayor in 2000 I was honored to help break ground for the Hutchinson Center and stand with the visionaries of MBNA. It is built on the site of a former chicken farm. The land and building was completely paid for by MBNA. What the University of Maine Hutchinson Center brought to Belfast was previously unattainable and unimaginable. It's simple to tell a single mother she should drive hours to take a class and my coworker did just that taking 12 years to complete her degree. But with the Hutchinson Center's arrival education suddenly became attainable for our area and students of every age from high school kids to seniors who all flocked to pursue their dreams and pack the Hutchinson Center. Belfast can never repay the vision and gift that MBNA and Charles Cawley brought to Belfast and to Bank of America who eventually gifted the center to the University of Maine. We remember their generosity.

Times change. Students' methods of educating themselves, the University's vision of how it seeks to serve Maine have changed **but Belfast's deep commitment for the Hutchinson Center** and our area's need for the Hutchinson Center has remained constant.

The University is ready to move on and focus elsewhere. Belfast is ready to move forward and remains focused on the mission of the Hutchinson Center to support education, community, the arts, and business. Speaking as a 22-year elected official who served Belfast and our area: we are solid in our commitment to retain and restore the future health, opportunities, and vibrancy of the Hutchinson Center to Belfast and the midcoast area. Belfast knows that if the Hutchinson Center is sold off to the highest bidder there will never be another educational and cultural facility like this in Belfast ever again.

We urge support of LD 2231 and thank Senator Chip Curry for submitting the legislation, thanks also to the co-sponsors, and I thank the committee for the opportunity to offer comment.

Thank you;

Michael Hurley

171 High Street

Belfast, Maine 04915

mike@pilut.com

207-338-1975

207-323-0881