



THE BELFAST CENTER
OFFICE & CREATIVE SPACE

March 5, 2024

**State of Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Hutchinson Center Bill LD2231 Public Hearing**

Prepared by John McKeith, member of the Future of the Hutchinson Center Steering Committee

Chair Rafferty, Chair Brennan, members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill to transfer ownership of the Hutchinson Center from the University of Maine to the City of Belfast.

I own and manage The Belfast Center, the largest commercial office building in Belfast. It is home to over 17 different counselors and therapists, the headquarters for Waldo Community Action Partners (WCAP) and a host of other community-oriented businesses. Every day, I see people from all over Belfast and from towns throughout Waldo County coming to our building to receive services, but also asking where they can learn new skills and learn how to move forward in our economy.

Every day, I see the first-hand the incredible importance of community involvement and the opportunity for local education. The Hutchinson Center is the right place to provide those exact opportunities.

Back in 2009, there was a huge outpouring of financial support from the local community for the expansion of The Hutchinson Center. The goal: To broaden the opportunities for community education and community involvement. People gave their money to this cause because they genuinely cared.

The Hutchinson Center was gifted to the University by the Bank of America, who perhaps didn't understand the importance of this Center to the greater Belfast community. But the University does. And it is their responsibility, as a pillar of continuing education here in the State of Maine, to honor the intent of The Hutchinson Center.

The closing paragraph of the University's mission statement states, simply: "Through integrated teaching, research, and outreach, the University of Maine improves the quality of life for people in Maine and around the world, and promotes responsible stewardship of human, natural, and financial resources."

How does the University publicly make this sweeping claim and then quietly try to profit from the sale of this gift to the highest bidder and remove this educational resource from the Belfast community? Think about it.

The Hutchinson Center needs to remain the crown educational jewel of Belfast, and be there to benefit and strengthen the community for generations to come. Please support LD2231.

Thank you.