

Dorothy Havey  
Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce  
33 Main Street  
Belfast, ME 04915  
207-338-5900

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Testimony for Bill LD2231 and Public Hearing, Senator Chip Curry of Waldo County

My name is Dorothy Havey and I am a resident of Belfast where I also serve as Executive Director of the Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce and Information Center, the only Chamber in Waldo County.

I am requesting the Joint Committee for Education and Cultural Affairs support this bill for the following reasons.

**My personal reason:**

The Hutchinson Center has been a fixture in our community since 2000 and has been a vital educational resource. I was the first member in my family to go to college and I chose UMaine Orono. Decades ago, as a 17-year-old high school graduate of a small, rural high school, entering a campus with 10,000 students was overwhelming. I was ill prepared to take my education seriously and didn't return after my freshman year. Many years later, after realizing the importance of a degree, I returned to college part time and the Hutchinson Center gave me a path towards success. I **am that** nontraditional, adult learner who completed a bachelor's degree through the Hutch. In turn, I have used that degree to help my community thrive.

**My community reason:**

As the Director of the Chamber of Commerce & Information Center, we welcome countless visitors to the area and locals alike. Belfast is a destination and attracts thousands of people every year, many who move here. What makes it attractive? Great food, authentic experiences, historic downtown, a local hospital, a great library, **and access to education**. When the Hutchison Center closed, we lost access to not only classes, but also our Senior College and space for our employers and nonprofit organizations to provide necessary education. Just one example, the hospital needed access to the Hutchinson Center labs to educate their workforce. Additionally, we respond to many inquiries about week-long conferences or educational sessions wanting the space that the Hutch once provided. The chamber has hosted job fairs, the Camden Conference, small business, and young entrepreneurs' sessions. **There is no alternative to that space** in the area.

In closing, please

- Retain the Center as the premier educational, cultural and community center of the Midcoast Maine region;
- Acknowledge and protect the community's investment in the Center; and
- Preserve the opportunity for higher education at the Hutchinson Center today and for the future.

Respectfully submitted,

