



Testimony in Support of LD 210

Maine Maritime Academy

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a testimony in support of LD 210. I am honored to serve as Interim President of Maine Maritime Academy a cornerstone of both academic and economic development in the State of Maine. With more than 1,000 students enrolled across our Undergraduate, Graduate, and Workforce Development programs, the appropriations outlined in LD 210 are essential to sustaining and advancing the Academy's mission.

Since its founding in 1941, MMA has played a critical role in educating and training seagoing and landside mariners, directly supporting Maine's maritime and defense industries. Our core academic programs in Maritime Engineering Technology and Operations and Maritime Transportation prepare students for both unlimited and limited Coast Guard licensing, ensuring a steady pipeline of skilled professionals. Additionally, our shipbuilding degree programs directly support national defense efforts through partnerships with the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Bath Iron Works, and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

MMA is one of only six maritime academies in the United States offering these specialized programs, and our strategic location on the DownEast coast allows for hands-on training opportunities unmatched by any other institution. Over the years, MMA has expanded its curriculum to include International Business and Logistics and Ocean Sciences, recognizing the evolving needs of the global maritime industry.

Today, MMA is actively pursuing innovative workforce training programs, including:

- The Maritime Industrial Workforce Training Center in Brunswick providing expanded job opportunities for Maine residents.
- The Bucksport Center for Professional Mariner Development, which offers industry specific training that enhances economic growth.

These initiatives represent the future of MMA—a future built on expanded educational offerings, workforce development, and long-term financial sustainability. However, it is important to acknowledge that these successes have been achieved with limited resources, underscoring the necessity of continued state investment.

Additionally, we find ourselves at a historic crossroads. The global shortage of licensed mariners is at its worst level since World War II—a critical issue that was recently highlighted in the Portland Press Herald:

- Over 80% of the world’s goods are transported by ship.
- Ocean freight accounts for 44% of the total value of U.S. trade.

To meet this growing demand, Maine Maritime Academy is undergoing some of the most transformative developments in its history, including:

- The arrival of the National Security Multi-Mission Vessel (NSMV) this fall, a state-of-the-art training ship fully funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration.
- A \$106 million capital project to rebuild MMA’s waterfront pier and docks, led by Reed & Reed from Woolwich, with many Maine-based subcontractors contributing.
- A \$34 million renovation of Curtis Hall, the largest single residence hall in Maine, ensuring a modern and comfortable living environment for students.

MMA graduates are recognized for their academic excellence and contributions to Maine’s economy. Our workforce development programs provide hands-on training to support Bath Iron Works and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, directly addressing the critical labor shortages in these industries. Additionally, our Bucksport Center’s Fire Training programs play a crucial role in maritime and emergency response training.

MMA is also an active partner in statewide educational and economic development initiatives, collaborating with the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine through the Maine Defense Industry Alliance. These partnerships help expand Maine’s footprint in the national defense industry and create new career pathways for students.

Each of the funding components in LD 210 is essential to the Academy’s success. The base appropriation is the foundation of MMA’s operating budget, and we appreciate the Governor’s inclusion of a 4% increase for FY 2026 and FY 2027. Additionally, we strongly support the allocation for Paid Family and Medical Leave, which, without funding, would present a significant financial challenge for the Academy. Casino funding benefits the students through necessary scholarships to maintain affordability.

Furthermore, The Schooner Bowdoin, a historic sailing vessel and training platform for MMA students, remains an important icon for the State of Maine. In 2023, the Bowdoin successfully sailed to Alaska, a journey that demonstrated the vessel's educational and cultural significance.

The \$50,000 allocation in LD 210 will provide critical support for the Bowdoin, enabling us to leverage additional gifts and contributions with a 4:1 match.

Another essential component of LD 210 is the requested funding for Curtis Hall, MMA's 54-year-old, 166,000-square-foot residential building that houses more than 600 students. While initial funding was allocated in 2020-21 for necessary upgrades, additional inflationary pressures and project scope limitations left critical needs unmet. The \$5 million appropriation will allow MMA to replace the building's roof and 60-year-old single-pane windows, ensuring a modernized, energy-efficient, and comfortable living space for students. Student surveys consistently highlight Curtis Hall renovations as a top priority for student satisfaction, recruitment, and retention.

Finally, the debt service support included in LD 210 is critical to meeting MMA's financial obligations, allowing the Academy to address:

- The original bonding for Curtis Hall renovations.
- The 10% match requirement for the federal Waterfront Pier project.

This funding directly impacts MMA's ability to pay down bonded debt obligations, reinforcing the Academy's long-term financial stability.

In closing, Maine Maritime Academy plays a vital role in supporting Maine's workforce, economy, and national security. Continued investment in MMA will ensure the success of our students, the strength of our maritime industry, and the prosperity of Maine's economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,
Craig Johnson
Interim President
Maine Maritime Academy

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