

# JEFF BADGER

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24 April 2025



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## Testimony in Support of HP 871, LD 1336

### An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-state Advisory Council

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Jeff Badger, I live in Cape Elizabeth and I am here to offer my strong support for LD 1336.

I am a professional in international education and affairs, currently serving as Program Director for the Council of American Overseas Research Centers in Washington, DC. Prior to this role, I spent 16 years as Department Chair and professor of art at Southern Maine Community College, where I launched a Global Studies Center and a study abroad program. I've also been an active member of Maine's art community for over 25 years, curating exhibitions with a focus on international exchange.

It was in this capacity that I first became involved with the Friends of Aomori and the Maine-Aomori Sister State Advisory Council. After joining the Friends of Aomori board, my colleagues and I founded the Maine-Aomori Printmaking Society (MAPS)—a five-year series of art exhibitions featuring printmakers from both Maine and Japan. This initiative produced a collection of 100 prints and 25 exhibitions across both countries. With support from the Maine Community Foundation and the Rines-Thomson Fund, we brought these exhibitions to communities across the state—from York to Eastport to Fort Kent—sharing the rich story of the Maine-Aomori relationship and expanding access to Japanese culture and the art of printmaking.

MAPS also facilitated two artist delegation visits: Japanese artists came to Maine in 2016, and Maine artists traveled to Japan in 2019. Both visits included public community events. The program has had many follow-on effects: international exhibition opportunities for Maine artists, fiscal support for local print studios, and additional educational efforts such as the Hashi exhibitions for K-12 students. All of this work has been accomplished entirely by volunteers.

The cultural impact of this partnership is clear. However, I recognize that to support authorization of the Maine-Aomori Sister State Advisory Council, it's important to also emphasize economic value. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, arts and cultural production contribute 2.7% - or \$2.5 billion - to Maine's economy, supporting over 18,000 jobs and \$1.2 billion in wages and benefits. In Portland, the economic energy of a First Friday art walk is easy to see, but similar MAPS events in smaller, rural communities are often even more impactful. Cultural events generate visibility and enthusiasm for international exchange, laying the foundation for deeper trust and stronger ties between Maine and Japan - ties that continue to encourage economic investment and development.

Thank you for your time, and I respectfully urge your support for LD 1336.

Sincerely,

Jeff Badger