

Testimony in support of LD 1336, An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-state Advisory Council
LMCCANN.OLSON@gmail.com

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Lynda McCann-Olson, a resident of South Portland. **I support LD 1336, An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-state Advisory Council.**

As President of Friends of Aomori, Director of the Hashi Exchange of Student Prints, Consultant for the Five College Center for East Asian Studies, and a duly appointed member by Governor Mills in 2024 of Maine Aomori Sister State Advisory Council. A visual arts educator with over 35 years of experience in Maine public schools and museums. Units inspired by the Art and Culture of East Asia are loved by my students. In response to student interest, I developed year-long studies on Japan, including history, culture, and the creation of artworks. In 2019, my work was recognized by Friends of Aomori, and I was selected as an Elementary Art Teacher Delegate to travel to Aomori on a cultural exchange. The exchange was scheduled during the annual art and culture celebration, when elementary students create block prints to celebrate Japan's iconic art form. I visited schools and museums, worked with artists and educators to learn strategies for making prints with elementary students. Now I share my knowledge with other educators around the state. As a result of personal contacts made during my exchange, I collaborate with the Aomori City Morning Rotary Club to host annual exhibitions. The Hashi-Aomori Exhibition is in March, the Hashi-Maine Exhibition is in September. Students of Japanese descent are honored by this connection to their heritage. All students are thrilled to have their artwork displayed in Japan and become part of the collection at the Aomori Museum of Art. In March, I attended the 5th Hashi-Aomori exhibition, renewing in-person contacts with administrators, curators, artists, and colleagues. This September marks the 6th Hashi-Maine exhibition at the Greely Center for the Arts in MSAD#51 serving students in Cumberland and North Yarmouth.

Before the Pandemic of 2019, there were 7-10 in-person exchanges between Middle Schools in Maine and Aomori, Japan, including the Casco Bay Exchange between Greely and Yarmouth students with Namioka Junior High. As educators in the 21st Century, our goals include nurturing global citizens by building empathy and cultural agility. Cultural exchanges, in-person or remote through the exchange of original artwork, contribute towards these goals by building person-to-person relationships that encourage connectedness to the wider world. A sense of connection builds peaceful diplomacy while dissolving fear and hatred. Establishment of the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council in statute, with a staff member at the Maine International Trade Center, is key to the future of this vital relationship.

Please support LD 1336, An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council to continue these activities that are vital to Maine students' understanding of their connection to the wider world.