

Good morning, Representative Crocket, other representatives, and clerks. I am Russ Cox, a professional illustrator, author, and visual arts teacher at Maine Arts Academy. I'm here to speak to you about opposing Maine House Bill 1571.

I have spent 40 years as a professional artist, working with such clients as Penguin Random House, McDonalds, Scholastic, Time, A&E, Warner Brothers, and many other publishers and businesses. Like my fellow pathway teachers (music, film, photography, dance, and theater) we bring such experience into the classroom. My fellow pathway teachers have toured the world, danced for thousands, written and produced plays and movies, and sold thousands of books. We have spent a lifetime learning, evolving, and adapting while perfecting our craft. These are things you learn outside of the classroom. We also bring professionalism to our classes, and our students respond well to our teaching because they know that we are working professionals.

With outside-of-the-box thinking and practice, we educate with applied knowledge through this experience. Our students grow and shine at an extraordinary rate. To see them beam with pride at the end of a school year because of such growth is outstanding. This growth happens because of what we bring into the classroom.

Although we do not have a certificate that officially states we are teachers at heart, we have been teaching our whole lives, from private students to a college level to elementary school visits, teaching the younger students the importance of all of the arts.

Maine Arts Academy is not like other high schools. We are special. I think of us in the same vein as Laguardia High School for the Arts in New York, only with moose and less traffic.

I am speaking to you today about the future of our school and, more importantly, our students' success. Their success is all of our success.

If you are still unconvinced or are wavering with your decision, I invite you to come to my classroom while I prep the next generation of artists for college or go into the visual arts field. Bring a pencil.

Thank you for your time.