

Kylie Bragdon
Maine Ocean School

April 22, 2021

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Maine State Legislature
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Distinguished Members of the Committee.

My name is Dr. Kylie Bragdon, I am the Executive Director of Maine Ocean School. As demonstrated by the previous testimonies, our school has effectively motivated and supported students' development through the use of our ocean-themed curriculum. During these unprecedented times we have also provided a safe and welcoming environment, allowing students to build positive relationships both in-person and virtually. We have also made hands-on, real world learning experiences and training more equitable to students throughout the state. We are a public school currently serving 14 different communities, but could have a far broader impact if given the opportunity. Perhaps most important to this committee, we have concessionally implemented the feedback that was provided during the last legislative session to improve our organization as a whole.

Last year, concerns were posed regarding our financial standing. As you are probably aware, unlike the State's other magnet school, we receive funding through the charter school model. This essentially means we receive a specific dollar amount for each student enrolled in our programming from the state. Until recently, the distribution of those funds had occurred inequitably, as we were not receiving funds based on the number of students for the given school year, as mandated by phase in producers for new schools outlined in Title 20a, Section 15683 subsection 9. With the help of Rep. Cuddy and Senator Curry, in recent conversations with the Department of Education this error has since been rectified and we are now receiving the funds necessary to sustain our operations. In addition, we have established fiscally responsible budgeting and spending practices, resulting in nearly 20% less in expenditures than expected for last fiscal year. Finally, our Foundation has made significant gains in building lucrative relationships with potential donors, and has submitted nearly \$350k in grant requests in the last 10 months. These collective efforts have allowed us to secure a more financially stable future for Maine Ocean School.

The second concern posed by this committee referred to the diversity and quality of our academic programs. To be clear, each of our courses are aligned to the Maine Learning Results and provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency. At Maine Ocean School we challenge and support students in the discovery process, while providing them with the flexibility to showcase their skills in the fashion which best suits their learning styles and interests. This year, I have witnessed their impressive capacities through the creation of 3D models, presentations, short films, and academic papers. It is important to note that this has occurred in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to our small student body, we have been able to address students' needs on a case by case basis so as to ensure academic progress would not be lost. Though there has been a great deal of uncertainty in the last year, the one thing our students could guarantee is that we would provide them with daily live instruction, whether it be in person or virtually. In addition to our regularly operating programs, we have adopted and implemented the NWEA as part of our yearly benchmark assessment, established a working student council, formed a yearbook committee, and incorporated a variety of outside trainings to support our students' long term goals.

Finally, I would like to address student recruitment. In only our third year of operation, we were able to increase our student body by 50%. Though competitively, this may seem inconsequential given that our last year's enrollment was only 14, the

lessons we have learned in the timeframe are significant. More specifically, we have found that students and families are yearning for flexible virtual options and are excited by our curriculum. We have since decided to make this a permanent part of our programming, therefore, becoming more accessible to all students throughout the state.

Conversely, we have also learned that parents are hesitant to enroll their student in a school where the future is uncertain. The sunset clause has significantly hindered our abilities to attract a larger student body. As a new school, the phases of development that I have described are not only necessary but also normative. With that in mind, if this committee would like to see the potential long term academic and economic benefits Maine Ocean School has to offer the state, it is only appropriate that you vote to pass LD1389. Thank you for your time and consideration, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,
Kylie Bragdon, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Maine Ocean School