

January 2022

To: The Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

RE: LD1389: An Act to Improve Maritime Education in Maine

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Stacey Keefer, I am a resident of Union and last year became a Trustee for the Maine Ocean School as approved by your committee. I have also served on the school's Workforce and Community Development Committee for several years. I have been involved in the marine industry for over 25 years in Maine and many of those years I have collaborated on workforce development projects and served as an Industry Education Liaison.

Over these many years I have learned and witnessed that there is no magic wand for workforce development and training needs. Even a \$15 million grant did not "fix" the workforce gaps in Maine's marine and boat building industry just over a decade ago. There are systemic challenges that have developed slowly, and I believe the solutions must be approached as long-term and systemic as well. So many industries sound like broken records when they declare that young people are unaware of local job opportunities. Maine Ocean School serves as one important education model that can help offer students an avenue to pursue their interests and expose them to so many interrelated marine opportunities. The students benefit from applied learning and industry connections before they select post-secondary education and/or careers.

Just last week I had the privilege of listening to student presentations for their final projects in Marine Mathematics. Students had to create a business plan, including marketing strategies, for a marine-related business. I was impressed. Most of them will likely have multiple jobs and careers over their lifetime but already understand the considerations and details that must go into a successful business plan.

Finally, as a Maine Ocean School Trustee I would like to add that it seems that the school was given a challenging operating model --not of their choosing-- and has had to make the best of it. The trustees, staff, students, and supporters of the school have had to spend an exorbitant and highly distracting amount of time defending their status with this Committee during the first few years of operation. Having to revisit the sunset clause is damaging to the confidence and ability to recruit new students. I would like to encourage this Committee to collaborate with Board of Trustees to honor the original founding legislation and offer fair time (in the midst of pandemic challenges) to assess potential new program models that would be mutually agreeable for fulfilling the mission of the school. Hopefully we can avoid having to revisit the sunset clause with each session of the legislature.

Respectfully,
Stacey Keefer
Maine Ocean School, Trustee