



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.

This school year has been undeniably crazy for everyone, students, teachers, families and our community as a whole. While we all struggled and juggled to try to imagine what could work for our children in unimaginable times, a little miracle happened for my family; The Maine Ocean School. At a time when all seemed chaos in the world and in our home, when we not only had our daughter's first year in high school looming, but also her bursting into her teen years ready for peers and stimulation and support and joy AWAY from the confines of a small family, hunkered down for everyone's well being, The Maine Ocean school opened up their virtual doors and EVERYTHING CHANGED.

You see, my daughter is a land-locked future Marine Biologist. We live deep in the woods, in the mountains with coyotes and bears, but since she was 5 years old she has proclaimed her love of the ocean and her plan on being a Marine Biologist with a special focus on Marine Mammal health and rehabilitation. As homeschoolers we fostered that with regular trips to the New England Aquarium and the Maine coast. But well-intentioned parents could only take her so far. And then the pandemic hit. And ALL of us feared for doors closing and the world growing too small for our children who's wings were just beginning to stretch. And then, the miracle. A program that we had dreamt of and yearned for from so far away opened its doors up virtually, and instead of Larkin's world closing down, it blew wide open.

This year my child has been engaged full time with MOS, "engaged" being the critical word here. She receives stellar academic guidance. Her teachers are readily and respectfully available. She is able to focus on exactly that which stimulates and excites her and motivates her to go further and deeper and dream big and make it real, and after all, isn't that what we want for our children? To not be limited by location, by cost, by a pandemic? But to have the resources to foster scientific inquiry, community service, applicable job skills and passion for that which motivates them to dream and accomplish?



A public magnet high school for marine science, technology, transportation, and engineering

Online school is weird in many ways, and yes, we often wish she could be right there in the classroom with everyone else, but without that as an option due to our location, the chance to engage with quality and attentive teachers dedicated to bringing out the best academically and emotionally in my child on -line is truly a miracle, whether or not we are in a pandemic. The faculty work with my child to include her, draw her in and motivate her with the same dedication and focus as any student sitting directly in front of them in the classroom.

Lastly I want to point out the all-important social aspect of high school. The community fostered and nurtured by MOS is exciting and loving and supportive and has been an unexpected boon to my otherwise introverted child. As I hear other folks bemoan the very real cataclysmic social/emotional consequences of this pandemic year for the children, I have to admit, that miraculously, my daughter has blossomed. I hear her laughter peeling out of her room, I meet her friends in the chat groups, and she is HAPPY.

What more can a parent ask for? An academically stimulating program that firmly sets my child on the trajectory to her life-long dreams, faculty that share the same passion and want to see her succeed, and a community of peers that support and delight each other. I don't know how we would have made it through this past year without The Maine Ocean School and all it has to offer, and I certainly don't want to imagine heading into the next year without it. Please look to the present and to the future and what is best for both our children and our community, and continue to fund The Maine Ocean School and all it has to offer ALL of us; a bright future for our kids, and a healthy marine ecology for our region and our planet.

In conclusion, I encourage you to vote in favor of LD 1389.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Kjellberg
Mother of Larkin Fern Kjellberg,
MOS class of 2024