



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.

At this point in my life, I have experienced multiple different styles of education. Up until my first year of high school, I had been homeschooled, and I joined Medomak Valley High School my freshman year. Public school was a whole new experience for me, and it was a little bit overwhelming at first. After I got over the initial period of settling into a normal high schooler's everyday routine, I found myself being very bored and uninterested in the material I was being taught. I found myself asking "when am I actually going to be using this?" and watching the clock, waiting for the school day to finally end. Needless to say, I did not enjoy my first year of high school very much.

When I heard about the Maine Ocean School, I was immediately interested. I had practically spent most of my life on the ocean, and was aspiring to become a marine biologist. I was reluctant to leave my previous school behind, not because of the academics, but because of the people I knew that I would be leaving behind. I applied nonetheless though, and began my second year of high school not really knowing what to expect. Even though this was the school's first year in the running, I immediately knew this was where I wanted to be. The classes lived up to and beyond the motto of "hands on, minds on" as the students were exposed to skills they would need in the maritime field. The first year included sailing, trips to ports, boatbuilding shops, and multiple visits to the Maine Maritime academy. Now this may seem like the school was just a bunch of field trips, but in actuality it was bringing us into the workplace where we could talk to professionals in the fields we were interested in. Rather than read it out of a book or watching a presentation or a slideshow, the students were shown in person the process of designing a ship, welding, charting, and how to operate vessels from a small sailing skiff to a tugboat. We had guest speakers come in as well to talk about their respective careers, from sea captains to model boat designers to ecologists. For a robotics course, we were taught by a retired naval engineer who had us build ROVs, all of which proved to be seaworthy.

These were just a handful of the experiences that I had here, which engaged me in the material and exposed me to what kind of careers would be available to me. It is real life, in-person experiences like these that are vital to not only keeping a student from getting bored with school, but helping them to get a leg up in succeeding in life. During one of the school



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

events that I attended, I got into conversation with someone who had just gotten done sailing around various parts of the world, and was about to leave for sea again. He told me that the most important thing to do was networking, although his language was slightly more colorful when he explained it. Networking is the gateway to opportunities you may have been completely oblivious to before, and by means of hands-on learning, the Maine Ocean School gives students the chance to do so, and provides them with the knowledge they need to be successful in any career they choose to pursue.

In conclusion, please vote in favor of LD 1389, so that future students may also benefit from the Maine Ocean School program as I have.

Thank You,
Cole Natale