

THE MAINE AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR MAINE'S GROWING FUTURE

BOX 148, HALLOWELL, ME. USA 04347

April 22, 2021

The Honorable Joseph Rafferty, Senate Chair
The Honorable Michael Brennan, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Cross Building, Room 208
Augusta, ME. 04333

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to speak with you this morning. My name is Sebastian Belle and I am the executive director of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA). The MAA represents the states aquatic farmers and the many infrastructure companies that provide goods and services to our producers. In the year 2020 our members grew products worth over 100 million dollars at the farm gate and employed over 700 Maine citizens.

I stand before you today (virtually) to testify in strong SUPPORT to LD1389, "An Act to Improve Maritime Education in Maine". This bill repeals the "sunset" provision in current law that terminates the powers, duties and authority of the Maine School for Marine Science, Technology, Transportation and Engineering (the Maine Ocean School) 90 days after the adjournment of the Second Regular Session of the 130th Legislature.

The Maine Ocean School (MOS) fills a vital role in our states marine economy by encouraging young students to aspire to marine careers at a critical time in their educational development. The aquaculture sector in Maine needs intelligent, well educated,

young people to work on our farms and start new businesses. Aquaculture is the fastest growing food production method in the world and Maine is part of that growth.

A recent workforce needs assessment study, commissioned by FocusMaine, the Gulf of Maine Institute and the MAA, recognized that the need for educated employees and entrepreneurs was one of the biggest barriers to continued growth of the Maine aquaculture sector. One of its key recommendations was the creation of secondary education programs that were rigorous, STEM based and that “fed” students into associate and bachelor programs focused on aquaculture and marine sciences. MOS is exactly that type of program. Finally, by combining traditional and innovative teaching methods, MOS helps Maine students experience and envision careers in Maines marine economy first hand. It is often exactly those experiences that shape students lives and aspirations. MOS is a great school and they deserve to be allowed to continue without constantly looking over their shoulder and wondering whether they will be there next year.

Please vote “Ought to Pass” on LD1389 and help Maine students contribute to our coastal economy.

Respectfully,

Sebastian Belle
Executive Director
Maine Aquaculture Association