

The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Testimony from James A. Coffman, Program Director, Maine IDeA Network of Biomedical
Research Excellence (INBRE)

In Support Of

L.D. 1389
An Act to Establish a Mobile Learning Lab

11 April 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is James Coffman, Associate Professor at MDI Biological Laboratory and Program Director of the Maine INBRE. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of L.D. 1389, An Act to Establish a Mobile Learning Lab.

General background:

The Maine IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE), which I direct, is a collaborative network of Maine educational and research institutions led by the MDI Biological Laboratory and funded by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Maine INBRE members also include Bates College, Bowdoin College, Colby College, College of the Atlantic, The Jackson Laboratory, Southern Maine Community College, the University of Maine, the Universities of Maine at Farmington, Fort Kent, Machias, and Presque Isle, and the University of New England.

Maine INBRE's mission is to grow and develop the capacity for cutting-edge biomedical research in Maine, by:

1. Creating a technically skilled workforce in Maine by engaging undergraduate students in biomedical research.
2. Providing research support to young faculty at Maine colleges and universities to increase their competitiveness for federal (NIH) biomedical research grants.
3. Improving the research infrastructure available to INBRE institutions through a collaborative network of core facilities with state-of-the-art equipment.

A long term goal of the Maine INBRE is to develop the human and physical infrastructure needed for a robust biomedical/biotech economy, and provide a pipeline into that economy for Maine students. The proposed Mobile Learning lab will significantly enhance those efforts, by providing an important teaching resource that engages underserved communities that have historically been excluded from participating in biomedical science, affording them with an entry portal to learning about scientific research that is an important steppingstone to the research opportunities provided by Maine INBRE institutions. The Mobile Learning Lab will create a state-of-the-art mobile life sciences lab that can meet students where they live and

learn, especially in rural and underserved communities, engaging them in the life sciences and offering hands-on learning in their own environments.

Importantly, investing in our students in the K-12 system engages and exposes them to career pathways as future bioscience talent, attracting and retaining a continuous flow of technically proficient talent. This innovative and collaborative program will leverage the strengths of Maine's life sciences institutions and organizations to create a unique opportunity for Maine students to learn about on-ramps to meaningful, in-demand careers that allow them to live, study, and work in Maine. The project will enable public school learners across Maine (especially in the most rural and underserved communities) to access valuable high-quality instruction, hands-on learning, and experiential learning opportunities in the life sciences which would otherwise not be available to them. In that way the proposed Act to Establish a Mobile Learning Lab will synergize and enhance the efforts of the Maine INBRE to develop the biomedical science economy of Maine.

Sincerely,

James A. Coffman
Program Director, Maine INBRE