

To the community of Durham,

Can a factory be a refuge? I've asked myself this question for three-straight school years. So far, the answer has been frustratingly consistent.

My name is Jake Baver, I am a Writing Tutor at Oyster River High School, and I am in strong support of AIR's proposed acquisition of space in Durham. Our youth are struggling, and they need a full-time refuge.

In the mask-mandated wake of COVID-19, I wanted to design a writing center that felt accessible to every student at ORHS, a space that, above all else, felt safe. I stationed warm lamps in strategic places, let fake vines unfurl over my personal collection of books, and played the low-fi indie jams I, myself, like to write to. I eagerly tacked up student artwork, hoping my clientele would feel they had a genuine purchase of the glowing space they were writing in.

As a result, the writing center has attracted more than just the academically inclined. Many of our community's most at-risk youth congregate to my room, and though I try my best to help them, they need more than soft lighting and Phoebe Bridgers on a bluetooth speaker. Our school counseling department is doing the best that they can, but every high school educator will tell you, we are dealing with a nation-wide teenage mental health crisis.

This is why Arts In Reach is so pivotal to the health of our community. For over twenty years, Arts In Reach has already been a force for good along the seacoast. They are a proven refuge for teenage girls and gender-expansive youth. When I caught wind of their want to acquire a brick and mortar location in Durham, I felt compelled to vocalize my support for their cause. Please, everyone involved, by supporting this cause, know that you are supporting the wellbeing of our community's next generation.

Sincerely and adamantly in favor,

Jake Baver