

Testimony of Paul Santomenna  
Freeport, Maine  
In favor of  
LD 1458  
“An Act to Increase Funding for the Maine School of Science and Mathematics”  
April 24, 2023

Senator Rafferty and the distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in favor of LD 1458.

As a parent of a recent Maine School of Science and Mathematics (MSSM) graduate, I'm very pleased to express my gratitude for MSSM and advocate increased funding that will lead to more Mainers experiencing the benefits the school has to offer.

MSSM is an extraordinary place. It brings together highly qualified teachers (many with PhDs) with highly motivated students in a tightknit community dedicated to open inquiry and academic rigor. It is a haven for kids with great promise who may not be challenged in a traditional public school. It is a place where teenagers transform into young adults equipped to become leaders in STEM fields and in their communities. It is, in short, a tremendous resource for Maine students.

One student who has benefitted from MSSM is my own child, who got to know MSSM by attending its summer camp for middle school students. They came back from Limestone invigorated and determined to attend MSSM for high school. Their freshman year at MSSM was a struggle at times but they persevered, returning to Freeport that summer as a noticeably more mature person. They continued to grow emotionally, socially and intellectually each year at MSSM, thriving on the challenging classes, deeply knowledgeable and engaged teachers and compassionate community. Today, they're doing exactly what they dreamed – studying astrophysics at their first-choice college, on their way to a promising and fascinating career. MSSM is absolutely central to the success my child is enjoying.

I'm testifying in favor of LD 1458 for a very simple reason: its passage will make the promise of MSSM available to more students and families. Thanks to the current level of flat funding from the State, MSSM's annual cost to parents is \$9,800. That's manageable for many middle class families, something I'm personally grateful for. It is not, however, manageable for working class families. Passage of LD 1458 would eliminate this cost, making MSSM accessible to the very students it could benefit the most. Just imagine the impact a MSSM education could have on a motivated student from a refugee family or an isolated rural settlement. It could open up new worlds for that child. And, when hundreds of such kids gain access to MSSM over a period of years, the benefits accrue to the State itself, helping develop the highly educated workforce Maine will need to thrive in the decades to come. We have an incredibly valuable asset in MSSM. Please help deliver that value to all Mainers. I urge you to support LD 1458.