

TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 1458

AN ACT TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE MAINE SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association, neither for nor against L.D. 1458.

There is no question the Maine School of Science and Mathematics has a good reputation in the field in terms of the students and faculty it attracts. Our concern with this bill, and what led our associations to go neither for nor against, is the school is not and never intended to be a public school in the true sense of the word “public”.

The school has an admissions process that includes review of academic achievement, and potential students are interviewed. Maine residents are not charged tuition, but there is a room-and-board fee.

This bill would have that room-and-board fee waived for Maine students and would take that money from the General Purpose Aid for Local Schools (GPA) account.

We understand additional state funding is being put in to cover the costs in the short-term, but believe this is an inappropriate use of GPA over the long-term.

Many communities, with the tuition being paid by the state, foot the bill for the room and board for the student and family. This is what happens in communities where there is secondary school choice. And if not that option for districts that have a high school, could a room and board sliding scale scholarship fund be established to which families could apply should they need assistance with the room and board fees? Were the state to pay the full amount, a student attending the MSSM would cost at least 1.5 times what the average tuition rate is across the state of Maine.

GPA is and should continue to be used to support public schools that accept all students in their communities. That support is a shared responsibility between local property taxpayers and the state. It sets a bad precedent and does not seem fair that local property taxpayers would be paying for something the vast majority of their community’s students will not be able to attend.