



Maine School of Science and Mathematics

A Residential Community of Academic Excellence

April 26, 2023

Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

I write in support of LD749. I am the Executive Director of the Maine School of Science and Mathematics, as well as an alumnus from the class of 2001. In 2019, U.S. News and World Reports ranked MSSM as the 2nd best public high school in the country. This year, niche.com ranked MSSM in the top 1/3 of 1% among public high schools, and recognized our world-class faculty as the 5th best in the nation, among over 20,000 schools. I am deeply proud of the accomplishments of our students and staff, but understand that the great things the school has done have been in spite of (rather than because of) our facilities, which are aging, outdated, and increasingly incompatible with the mission and program of the state's flagship public school.

MSSM, the state's only magnet school, was founded in 1994. In the opening years of the school, students were housed on the former Loring Air Force Base and bused to Limestone Community School, where they attended classes taught by MSSM instructors in rented space. Simultaneously, the former Limestone Elementary School was being renovated into a dormitory for MSSM students. This building was a generous gift from the Town of Limestone. Also during this time, MSSM secured faculty housing adjacent to campus from the federal government, taking on a long-term lease on a row of houses previously occupied by Air Force officers. As enrollment fluctuated over the past decade, MSSM was the beneficiary of another gift, "The Manor" retirement home in downtown Limestone, which was used for several years to house students during a period of enrollment growth before being deemed uninhabitable due to structural and safety concerns. The Manor was sold at auction last year. Last summer, the Maine legislature reaffirmed the requirement that MSSM remain in Limestone—this resolution was welcome, and Limestone is an excellent location for the school, but does limit the school's facility options: we must improve or expand our existing physical plant, rather than seek a new campus elsewhere.

In summary, the Maine School of Science and Mathematics, nearly 30 years old, has never engaged in a major capital project at the state's expense since its founding. Minor upgrades and acquisitions have come out of our operational budget (which has been flat funded for seven years, with two additional years at this funding level expected) or via the generosity of the MSSM Foundation and our local community. As a purely state-operated school, MSSM falls outside the school categories and mechanisms that support school improvement, renovation, and upgrades (for example, we cannot access the School Revolving Renovation Fund). While SAUs can go to their municipalities and local taxpayers to fund school renovations, MSSM depends entirely on the state for both operational and capital funding.

The state of our facilities leaves the school lagging far behind modern high schools in Maine, as well as behind our sister schools in other states. The North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, upon which MSSM's model is based, recently built a second campus in Morganton, NC, at a cost exceeding \$160 million. What we ask for today is a

modest amount that would allow us to update and expand our capacity in our current dormitory. With the support of this bond, the school will be able to expand enrollment to serve a larger number of Maine's talented students and operate at a more efficient school size.

I urge you to support this proposal, and suggest a slight amendment to allow these funds to be used for either a) construction of new facilities and/or b) improvement and expansion of the current dormitory. In our marketing material, we have frequently come back to the phrase "it's time!" to encourage families to apply. To the state of Maine, I now say: it's time. Time to reinvest in the state's best and most important high school, and begin to bring its facilities into the modern era.



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