

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, my name is Jeff Candura, I use he/him pronouns, and I am the Development Director for the MSSM Foundation, a 501(c)3 set up alongside the Maine School of Science and Mathematics with the goal of supporting the school, and its faculty, staff, and students.

I am here on behalf of the Board of the MSSM Foundation – made up of MSSM alumni, parents, and friends – to urge your support for LD749.

The statute that established MSSM allows for a scholarship and educational enhancement fund – the MSSM Foundation. The statute also clearly states that those private funds raised “may not be used to offset, reduce or eliminate the appropriation of state funds” and “may not reduce or eliminate the State's funding obligations.”

Support for MSSM from donors has been strong and continues to increase as alumni age and become more established in their careers. In the last school year alone, the MSSM Foundation has transferred almost \$100,000 in private donations to the school for purposes including: professional development for faculty and staff, the purchase of new classroom equipment, student travel to competitions, the establishment of a summer bridge program for incoming students, the development of an updated website, physical improvements to the dorm, and student financial aid. We expect to transfer a greater amount of funds in the next school year.

The need for private donations is growing at MSSM, and we at the Foundation are more than happy to work to fill that need. Based on my 20 years of experience, the ceiling for MSSM's fundraising potential is high. We know that there are donors who would contribute to an effort

to renovate facilities. We often hear from alumni and donors that they would like to contribute to outdated chemistry labs, or improvements to the dorm, or updated academic spaces. But in the next breath, they lament the lack of investment in these spaces from the state of Maine. In order for the MSSM Foundation to work with private donors on areas of need, those donors need to see evidence that the primary stakeholder in the school, the state of Maine, believes that it should thrive. Right now, our donors do not see that commitment.

Increasingly, our work is blurring the line between enhancing the academic experience and “reducing the State’s funding obligations.” For example, we are currently working with a donor to fund a new fume hood for our chemistry lab. I struggle to imagine any other public school needing to rely on private donations for such a fundamental piece of capital. There is only so much that philanthropy can do – the State must take the lead.

School districts around Maine are currently submitting budgets to their cities and towns – most of them with large increases. Here are some of the increases according to news reports: MSAD75 - 6.5%; Westbrook 9.6%; RSU1 - 3.6%; SAD51 - 7%; Camden Hills Regional High School - 17.26%; SAD44 - 10.39%. I could go on. Again, this is just a single year’s increase – MSSM has not seen an increase in state subsidy in five years. MSSM has no municipality it can go to to request additional funds. It is up to the State to support MSSM. The first things to be cut when budgets are tight is deferred maintenance and capital improvements. Year after year of flat funding has taken its toll on MSSM’s physical plant.

A bill, LD1458, which hopefully to this committee soon, would bring MSSM’s funding to a reasonable level. That funding increase, in combination with this bond, would allow MSSM to start bringing its

physical plant up to snuff, and would help to unlock a significant amount of private fundraising to support MSSM and help keep MSSM sustainable for another generation of Maine students.

Even with these headwinds, MSSM has remained a top performing school and an economic engine for the state of Maine. While MSSM graduates routinely attend top ranked colleges and universities around the country, 33% of college bound graduates in the last five years stayed in state for higher education, with the #1 school for applications, acceptances, and attendances being the University of Maine at Orono. MSSM is Maine's High School. We need to support it and its capital plant as such.

I have spent most of my career in educational fundraising. I have done so because I believe that education is the greatest social mobilizer available to us. If we have any chance of solving the problems of the future, we need to start by providing those who will shape the future a strong education now. Many of the future leaders of our state are in Limestone at MSSM. On behalf of the MSSM Foundation Board of Directors, I strongly urge you to move LD749 forward.

Thank you.