

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Marian Reagan and I am the current elected Chair of the appointed Board of Trustees of the Maine School of Science and Mathematics. I am also a parent of an MSSM graduate and a resident of Kennebunkport, ME. I was appointed to the MSSM Board by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature in 2018 and am in my second year serving as Chair.

As the appointed fiduciaries of MSSM, the Board of Trustees are responsible for ensuring both the viability of MSSM and that public funds are used appropriately and efficiently. This is not a responsibility we take lightly - we work closely with the School's administration to develop a balanced budget each year, receive and review regular performance reports from the School's administration, and conduct an independent audit of the School's finances and internal controls each year.

During my time on the Board, MSSM has received flat funding for its operations. Even through a period of normal inflation, this would be a significant challenge for any organization. Given the high inflation rates that we have seen in recent years, the impact of flat funding has been crippling to MSSM's ability to deliver on its mission. I am almost embarrassed to represent the State of Maine in asking the School's administration to find more operational savings. In almost every year I have been on the Board, the administration has presented the elimination of a position. I have watched the School eliminate 5 FTEs in just the past two years - good jobs for Mainers and jobs that are important to serving the students of Maine. I have seen the School continue to shrink its discretionary spending (things outside of rent, utilities, food service) - for next year the School committed to finding 10% or more in savings in this area - cuts to things like academic supplies, student activities, athletics, and other areas that are important to serving the students Maine committed to serving when MSSM was established 30 years ago. At the same time, the School increased its financial aid budget to 10% of its entire appropriation.

We have heard that some of our recent flat funding has been because we didn't follow the appropriate process with the Department of Education. The Board charged the executive director with ensuring we do this and, in June 2024, MSSM submitted a budget proposal for the next biennial to the Department of Education as requested. We suggested modest increases of \$250,000 for the 2025-26 year and \$116,000 for the 2026-27 year. These increases did not address years of flat-funding, did not provide for investment in exciting initiatives to better serve our students, and were accompanied by increased expectations on the School increasing its other revenue sources. Despite following the process and the modest increases, the School was informed that the DOE would not include any additional funding for the next biennial.

Even with this funding travesty, I remain impressed with the School's delivery on its mission. This year, the School has retained 100% of its students to date - a significant accomplishment unmatched in its history that represents the efforts to address student well being and mental health. The School has seen the highest number of inquiries and applicants in the last five years, and we are projecting reversing several years of enrollment declines next year. The School has been developing partnerships to expand its impact beyond just the students living on campus. The School's administration has worked with the Board to look forward and we are in the midst of a comprehensive and exciting strategic planning process. And, even while accomplishing all of this, the School's administration again cut some positions, found more savings, and sacrificed some more programming in an effort to present a balanced budget for tomorrow.

It is time to reverse this blatant disregard for this important Maine institution. It is time to own the decision that Maine made 30 years ago when it established a STEM magnet school and one of only a small number of

public boarding schools in the country. It is time to treat Maine's students better and recognize that there are two sides of the special needs continuum and that MSSM is an efficient and effective way to serve the high end of that continuum that has demonstrated success. It is time to invest in educational success - like we continue to see at MSSM.

Thank you for considering LD787 and I encourage you to move this important bill forward with your highest recommendation.