

Testimony in Support of LD 1740

An Act to Establish the Maine Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) Matching Grant Program

My name is Blake Bourque, and I'm proud to speak in support of LD 1740.

I was a founding member of FIRST Robotics Team 2648 at Messalonskee High School in Oakland, Maine. Being part of that team opened a world of opportunities—from learning technical and collaboration skills in a competitive environment, to connecting with potential employers, and ultimately landing my first job based on relationships built through that program.

Now, I serve as lead mentor for another FIRST Robotics team and as president of FIRST MA, a nonprofit that supports over 200 youth robotics and engineering teams across New England.

The impact of these programs is quantifiable and lasting:

- 86% of students who graduate from my team go on to pursue careers in technical fields—including the trades, computer science, math, engineering, and physics.
- Over 50% of my high school classmates still call Maine home, building careers and families here, and in many cases, finding ways to bring jobs to the state.

Why LD 1740 Is So Important

This bill would fund hands-on STEAM programs that equip K–12 students with the skills and confidence to pursue high-demand, high-wage fields. It would do so through:

- A competitive grant program that supports robotics, design, arts competitions, and more.
- A 33% local match, ensuring buy-in from schools, businesses, and nonprofits.
- A focus on underserved and economically challenged communities, where opportunity gaps are widest.

What Makes This Bill Strong

- It allows flexible use of funds—from materials to coach stipends to travel for competitions.
- It includes clear reporting requirements so results can be tracked and the program improved over time.
- It ensures equity across both of Maine's congressional districts, broadening access regardless of ZIP code.

Final Thought

I know firsthand the power of these programs—not just as a mentor and advocate, but as a student who grew up in rural Maine. LD 1740 represents an investment in Maine's youth that will yield real returns in workforce readiness, community vitality, and economic growth.

I urge the committee to issue an "Ought to Pass" and fully fund this important program. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Blake Bourque
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