



Testimony of Angela Oechsle
Director, STEM Pathways & Innovation, Educate Maine
In Support of L.D. 1740 and L.D. 823
Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

Monday, May 5, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Angela Oechsle, and I am the Director of STEM Pathways & Innovation at Educate Maine. As a trusted nonprofit focused on education advocacy and expanding educational and economic opportunity for all Maine people, Educate Maine is particularly interested in

I am here today to voice strong support for both L.D. 1740 — An Act to Establish the Maine Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics Matching Grant Program — and L.D. 823 — An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Provide for Statewide and Equitable Access to Experiential Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Competition Programs.

Both of these bills address urgent needs in Maine's education system—needs we hear echoed daily from educators, families, and students across the state. They share a common purpose: to ensure that all Maine students, regardless of where they live, have access to transformative, high-quality STEAM experiences.

L.D. 1740 would create a structured, Department-administered matching grant program to support STEAM initiatives in K–12 schools. One of the bill's greatest strengths is its built-in 33% local match requirement. This feature ensures that the state's investment is met with local buy-in—encouraging schools and communities to take ownership of these programs and commit to their long-term success. It's a model that promotes sustainability, partnership, and shared responsibility for student outcomes.

In a time when many districts are stretched thin, this kind of cost-sharing sends a strong signal: STEAM education is not a luxury—it's a priority worth investing in together.

L.D. 823, administered by the Maine Technology Institute (MTI), takes a complementary approach by focusing on statewide and equitable access to STEM competition programs—experiential learning models that are proven to ignite interest, build critical 21st-century skills, and foster collaboration and creativity. This bill recognizes that competitions like robotics leagues, science fairs, and tech challenges are not just extracurricular—they are powerful gateways into lifelong engagement with STEM fields.

What makes L.D. 823 especially powerful is its commitment to reach all 16 counties in Maine, ensuring no student is left behind simply because of geography. Partnerships with the University of Maine System are an excellent strategy as they also expose student learners to higher education opportunities.

Administering the program through MTI also creates strong alignment between education and the innovation economy, which is exactly the kind of partnership we need to grow a future-ready workforce.

Together, these bills represent a bold step forward in Maine's educational and economic development. They will expand equity, inspire innovation, and strengthen the pipeline from classroom to career. Investment in both of these efforts would be a game changer for schools looking to expand opportunities in coding, robotics, engineering, arts integration, and more.

I urge you to support L.D. 1740 and L.D. 823 and invest in the potential of every Maine student.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,
Angela Oechsle
Director, STEM Pathways & Innovation
Educate Maine