

## **Testimony in Support of LD 1740 - An Act to Establish the Maine Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics Matching Grant Program**

My name is MaryBeth Luce, I live in Arundel, and I am submitting my testimony to express my strong support for LD 1740, *An Act to Establish the Maine Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics Matching Grant Program*.

I am the coach of FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) Team 9732, Rainbow Junkyard, a team I founded in 2024. FRC is an international program that challenges high school students to design, build, program, and operate industrial-sized robots in a time-bound competitive setting. Competitive robotics programs like FRC are more than just building robots; they're about teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and applying concepts from science, technology, engineering, arts, and math in a tangible way.

Our team, Rainbow Junkyard, operates as a community team based out of the STEM Coliseum & Learning Center of Maine, whose vision is to inspire young people to be mechatronics and technology innovators, creators, entrepreneurs, and leaders, cultivating workforce readiness for the benefit of Maine's future. Unlike school-based teams, we are open to any interested high school student in southern Maine, including homeschool students and those whose own schools do not currently offer an FRC program. This open structure allows us to provide opportunities where they might not otherwise exist, but it also means we do not receive direct financial or logistical support from a single school district. Consequently, we bear the responsibility of raising our entire operating budget – a minimum of \$20,000 annually – through sponsorships, grants, and team fundraising efforts. For community-based teams like ours, which play a vital role in expanding access to high-quality STEAM programs, the matching grant program established by LD 1740 is not just helpful, it is absolutely essential for sustainability and growth.

On a personal note, I have seen firsthand the profound difference these programs can make. My own son struggled to find engagement in traditional school settings due to his autism and ADHD. Through FRC, he discovered a place where he not only fit in but thrived. The collaborative, project-based nature of the program allowed him to leverage his unique strengths and perspective. He found his stride, contributing significantly to the team's success. He is now committed to continuing with the team as a mentor, offering him further growth opportunities while demonstrating to other students facing similar challenges that their unique viewpoints and learning styles are not just welcome, but essential ingredients for innovation and success in STEAM fields.

Furthermore, investing in competitive STEAM programs through LD 1740 is a direct investment in Maine's future workforce and long-term economic prosperity. Programs like FIRST Robotics Competition and the STEM Coliseum & Learning Center foster exactly the skills our state needs: advanced technical proficiency, collaborative problem-solving, and the capacity for innovation. To

build a thriving economy attractive to modern industries, we must cultivate a culture where intellectual competition and achievement in science and technology are celebrated and supported with the same enthusiasm often reserved for traditional athletics. By elevating these pursuits, we signal to businesses that Maine is serious about cultivating top-tier talent. This bill, therefore, is not just about supporting students today; it's about laying the critical groundwork for Maine's innovative economic success for decades to come.

LD 1740 recognizes the importance of providing diverse pathways for Maine students to explore STEAM fields. By supporting programs like competitive robotics, Odyssey of the Mind, and One-Act Plays alike, this bill will help cultivate the next generation of creators, problem-solvers, and leaders in our state. It will allow more students, regardless of background or learning style, to access the kinds of high-engagement, hands-on experiences that ignite passion and build crucial skills for the future.

I urge you to support LD 1740 and invest in the future of Maine's students through the power of STEAM education. Thank you for your time and consideration.