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Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you in support of LD1740, an act to establish the Maine science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics matching grant program. I have been a public educator in Maine Schools for 23 years, teaching music from kindergarten through twelfth grade and also have raised four children that have gone through the public education system and I would like to share some of my observations in the education system to support this bill.

I have been part of drama programs, including one act plays, high school musicals, middle school drama programs, directing bands, choruses and also teaching general music. Also in my spare time when I'm not doing that, as a parent I have supported my children through Lego League Programs and Robotics Teams through First Robotics and also multiple sporting events through the many years.

As a parent and educator I have seen my children and many of my students flourish through these programs that are more associated with STEAM rather than just STEM. The arts are a powerful teaching tool that builds confidence and creativity for our students that invest the time into these programs. Teaching students to use their creative side when addressing a problem whether it be how to act a scene out, address an environmental problem or learning to appropriately and successfully get their point across to an audience is an important skill to learn which often is not addressed enough in the normal classroom.

The initial startup for many of these programs can be difficult for schools especially in this time when budgets are getting tighter and money must be allocated for regular education classes. This bill can help schools start these programs off to create the interest needed to continue them in the following years. These competitive programs such as Robotics, One Act Plays, and other similar programs are not only supported in the schools but also supported through the state, country level, where advisors and students encourage others from other school districts to be the best at their skills and to keep building the programs.

In conclusion, this bill would be of great benefit to helping schools start and create programs that don't currently exist or have in the past but had to end due to funding. It gives students opportunities to better themselves through STEAM by learning lifelong skills to help them become successful leaders in the coming future and also give students another important reason to come to school and better themselves. Many of these organizations are student run, with advisors to simply keep basic direction. This gives students true ownership of their work in these situations and gives them a finished product they can be proud of.