

**Mason Labonte  
Livermore  
LD 823  
May 4, 2025**

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

My name is Mason Labonte, and I am a student at Spruce Mountain High School and the Foster Career and Technical Education Center. I am writing in strong support of LD 823, An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Provide for Statewide and Equitable Access to Experiential Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Competition Programs.

I believe every student should have access to hands-on learning opportunities—regardless of the financial or economic circumstances of their school, district, or town. LD 823 supports that belief. By helping fund experiential STEM competition programs, it gives students across the state the chance to participate in activities that go far beyond the classroom.

I've seen how impactful these programs can be. I've been involved in FIRST® LEGO® League and FIRST® Robotics for six years. Through those teams, I didn't just learn about engineering—I learned how to manage a budget, lead a team, communicate professionally, and solve real-world problems. These skills are preparing me for a future in business administration.

Because of my robotics involvement, I was able to attend the Foster Career and Technical Education Center starting in my freshman and sophomore years—even though most students can't do that until junior year. That early access helped me discover the Business Academy program, which I now love. Robotics led me to CTE. This is exactly the kind of co-curricular experience LD 823 makes possible.

Maine's geography creates real barriers—especially for rural students like me. Funding and transportation are two of the biggest hurdles. This bill helps schools overcome both. It gives students a chance to access programs that might otherwise be out of reach—programs that can shape their careers before they even graduate high school.

Some may ask if LD 823 goes far enough. I believe it does what it is intended to do—and it does it well. Where other bills like LD 1740 focus on matching funds and broader partnerships, LD 823 ensures that direct support reaches programs and students most in need. It's a practical, effective step toward equity in education.

To those of you undecided: please support LD 823. It gives students access to opportunities they would not otherwise have—and connects them to meaningful, career-shaping technical education in a real-world, co-curricular setting. I am living proof of what programs like these can do. Let's make sure every student in Maine gets that same chance.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Mason Labonte

