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My name is John Boynton and I am a mentor of 6329: The Bucks' Wrath, a FIRST Robotics Team from Bucksport High School in Bucksport, ME. I am writing this testimony because I have seen first hand just what an amazing impact having a robotics team has done for the kids of our community. We started our team in 2017 with just a handful of students in the school's woodshop that was in debate on whether it should be closed for good. We now have nearly thirty students (10% of the school's population) on the team and those student come from all different walks of life. Every single year the program has grown and our shop has grown with it. Now thanks to the robotics program, our school has six 3d printers, a CNC Mill, a CNC Router, a CNC Laser Cutter, and a CNC Lathe that all students have access to at Bucksport High School. We have added classes to the curriculum including Intro to Engineering, Advanced Engineering and Robotics, Intro to CAD and Machining, and Computer Science and Programming. We are also looking to add an Intro to Software Engineering class in the future. We have seen an exponential increase in our students choosing to go to post-secondary programming focused on STEM careers, the vast majority of which are staying in Maine. Robotics not only teaches kids about STEM, but has a way of teaching kids all of the soft skills they would otherwise not learn in school. They are taught to be leaders, communicate, and work with people of all backgrounds all while focused on a common goal. We have managed to make a WORLD CLASS robotics team here in little Bucksport, Maine and why this bill is so important is because running a robotics program is an expensive endeavour. Bucksport, like most communities has a massive low income population. We have school policies about travel and meals that the team must provide for all team members to promote inclusion in the program. This means that to be able to compete around New England and the World Championship, we must fundraise nearly $85,000 annually just to keep the program alive. Bucksport does not have any big companies to help support us so we rely heavily on a ton of small donations made by local businesses. We are also so rural that all of the major national grants that require a member of the team be employed by (or within a certain radius of) their businesses just do not apply to our team. While we manage to make it work, most teams do not. We are one of only four teams in the state located north of Augusta. So many teams have folded due to lack of funding and it is not fair that so many communities do not get the same benefit that we see in our kids. A matching grant program by our state would be massive in growing programs like ours into more rural and low income communities.

I have attached a video the students made about the impact our program has made on our students lives:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tn9TWnpJJrI

and a video recap of an event held here in Maine in which we won the Engineering Inspiration Award for our work promoting STEM in our community:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEyJxDx0zfY