

TO: The Honorable Joseph Rafferty
The Honorable Kelly Noonan Murphy, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

DATE: May 5, 2025

RE: LD 1740 - An Act to Establish the Maine Science, Technology,
Engineering, Arts and Mathematics Matching Grant Program

I am John Kraljic, a retired, 45 year veteran of teaching Engineering & Technology Education in Maine schools, and volunteer at the STEM Coliseum and Learning Center in South Portland. This testimony is in support of LD 1740, An Act to Establish the Maine Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) Matching Grant Program.

The STEM Coliseum and Learning Center is a 501(c)3 organization with a vision to inspire young people to be mechatronics and technology innovators, creators, entrepreneurs, and leaders through cost-effective, mentor-led experiential programs and competitions, cultivating workforce readiness for the benefit of Maine's future.

As Maine students have fewer and fewer educational opportunities for hands-on, minds-on experiences as part of their normal school day; LD 1740's matching grants will counter this trend by supporting STEAM project-based programs. With funding cutbacks at federal level, state level support becomes even more critical to the growth and even the survival of hands-on STEAM programs.

Research done by the *National Math and Science Initiative* (4/17/2024) found that, "Hands-on science education promotes problem-solving and critical thinking. Working through experiments and activities requires students to make observations, hypothesize, and draw conclusions based on evidence. The practical approach fosters essential critical thinking skills that students carry into adulthood." These are the skills that today's students will need to navigate their increasingly complex future world. Hands-on, experiential learning, also supports learning styles of students who do not typically thrive in a traditional classroom environment.

Local support for hands-on, minds-on programs for Maine K-12 learners is critical to the development of skills that will allow them to thrive in the future. For that reason, I support LD 1740 and encourage the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs to do the same.

