

Testimony in support of LD 1740

“An Act To Establish the Maine Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics Matching Grant Program”

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Christopher Johnson, from Somerville, and I am testifying in favor of LD 1740.

I’ve seen and judged robotics competitions of schools from all over New England. Some teams are organized with school support, some 4H, and some teams with members from multiple area schools. There are costs involved to access the materials, sometimes for equipment, and for many, to travel to competitions. Fewer teams hail from the more rural and disadvantaged parts of their states. In talking with the students about their teamwork, their design efforts, collaborative process, and performance strategies I see future engineers, designers, and problem solvers who because of these experiences are interested in such careers.

I know students and watched their performance participating in Odyssey of the Mind (OM) that learn to solve creative artistic design challenges, collaborate on a solution, and through motivation and practice learn to be performers that are adaptive, entertaining, imaginative, spirited and able to work effectively as a performative team. It took them to the OM world competition where they placed 6th in the world. Yet, it almost didn’t happen. Because their school didn’t budget for OM, or for travel to the world competition. Their coaches were volunteers. And it took a lot of fundraising and contributions by friends and relatives to make attending that world competition possible. Yet these are students who through such experiences learned to think on their feet, create their sets and costumes, know they have what it takes to perform in public, are able to collaborate in creative process and have greater confidence in themselves. Who knows, they may be our future leaders or actors, or even inspirational teachers some day.

Sadly, these real career inspiring opportunities aren’t available to all students, nor in many of Maine’s schools. Regardless of where they live in Maine every student deserves the chance to discover whether such career enabling experiences are right for them. And believe me, I’ve seen the excitement and talent shining brightly in students because of these activities.

I ask you to unanimously support an Ought to Pass report on LD 1740 to ensure such character and career building opportunities exist for many more of Maine’s students.

Honorable Christopher K. Johnson
Somerville, Maine