

Bradley Bickford  
Belgrade  
LD 1740

Written testimony in support of An Act to Establish the Maine STEAM Matching Grant Program

Bradley Bickford

Mentor - FIRST Robotics Competition Team 2648, Infinite Loop Robotics  
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Dear Committee Members,

My name is Bradley Bickford, and I am writing to support An Act to Establish the STEAM Matching Grant Program. I am a life-long resident of Belgrade, a State of Maine employee, an alumni of high school robotics Team 2648 - Infinite Loop based in Oakland, and have been a mentor and competition volunteer for the same program for 12 years.

The STEAM-based robotics program that I participated in as a student had no immediate parallels in regular high school curriculum. Individual pieces were in some ways available, like mechanical or shop class, basic electronics, and programming, but nothing that brings these domains together into one cohesive experience. These more conventional skills were taught alongside soft skills, like problem solving, time management, and teamwork. I can confidently say that I would not be the same person I am today if it weren't for the robotics program I participated in.

I have the privilege to see the same program from the mentor perspective as well. Students come into these programs with little to no experience in any of the domains described. It is truly inspiring to watch the progress that each student makes and what they take away from the program when they finally graduate. The creativity of groups of high school students when given the resources to succeed is nothing short of amazing.

I want every student in Maine to have the same opportunities I have had, to feel the same awe at being able to say "I helped build that". The barrier for most students to get into these programs is cost. I have seen many robotics programs similar to the one that I'm a part of fail because their school system or community businesses cannot support the programs to the level necessary. I ask that you choose to support this bill to enable more students to access programs like the one that I've described.

Thank you.