

Alyson Saunders  
Garland  
LD 823

Dear members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Alyson Saunders and I teach biology, advanced biology and a STEM Research class at Dexter Regional High School. Over my 17 year career I have taken nearly 60 students to the Maine State Science Fair from either my advanced biology or STEM class. Every year my students have come away from the experience with gratitude and enthusiasm. Having the opportunity to conduct independent research and then to present it to a group of professionals who provide meaningful feedback and encouragement is often formative in a young person's life. I have many students who have participated in the MSSF and then gone on to pursue a career in STEM fields ranging from computer science and agriculture to nutrition and engineering just to name a few. They are here in the state making meaningful contributions to our economy and building our STEM workforce.

Conducting independent research projects is a challenging endeavor and requires resources that not all schools and students have access to. Making sure that students from all areas of Maine, including under-resourced areas, have equitable access to competitions like the MSSF (which unlike most STEM competitions - is completely free to compete in) is an investment in our future and tells young people that in fact, the government DOES care about them and their futures. I urge you to support LD 823.

I would like to share a few personal quotes from my current STEM Research Students about the value of the MSSF to them.

"Participating in the Maine State Science allowed me to learn things I'd never thought I'd ever learn about in a regular science classroom. I learned so much about not just my topic, but also crucial scientific practices. As I want to enter a science-related profession, participating in MSSF provided me with a sort of unique foundational knowledge I otherwise wouldn't have discovered in my high school science classes." - Junior, DRHS student

"The Maine State Science Fair was an incredible experience that sparked my curiosity and deepened my passion for learning. It allowed me to explore a topic in depth and I truly feel like a scientist. The most rewarding part was presenting the project I had worked so hard on, and I believe this opportunity should be made available to future students as well." - Freshman, DRHS student

"MSSF has improved my ability to articulate words to express myself well and professionally. It has also improved my ability to gather data for something that I enjoy and compile it" - Freshman, DRHS student.

"The Maine State Science Fair has helped me form a future full of dreams and endless possibilities, and it is only the beginning of my journey all thanks to MSSF. " - Senior, DRHS student

"The Maine State Science Fair provides an abundance of opportunities to those interested in areas of science researching." - Freshman, DRHS student

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.