

## **Written Testimony**

**To:** Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs

**From:** Eliza Meyer

**Date:** 1-29-26

**Re:** Testimony in Support of An Act to Provide Funding to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics and Clarify Sending School Administrative Unit Obligations

Chair Rafferty, Chair Murphy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Eliza Meyer, and I am a resident of Vassalboro and the parent of a student at Maine School of Science and Mathematics. I am writing to express my strong support for An Act to Provide Funding to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics and Clarify Sending School Administrative Unit Obligation.

As a parent who has seen my child thrive in the uniquely challenging and supportive learning environment that is MSSM, I am very invested in the success of this school. I also have intimate experience with the confusion that can result when a town that “tuitions out” for secondary school decides that it does not have to contribute towards the cost of attendance at MSSM because the portion not covered by the state is identified as room and board rather than tuition.

The budgetary squeeze that MSSM faces after being flat-funded since FY2017, in combination with increasing costs exacerbated by recent inflation, is very real. The students see it in frequent staff and faculty turnover, aging school infrastructure, and even a reduction in the quality and variety of food in the cafeteria, as the same amount of funding has to somehow cover much higher costs. Parents experience it in watching positions be eliminated or reduced, and when interacting with administration and staff who are doing incredible work but clearly are stretched very thin. I want to be clear that we are not expecting a luxury or elite boarding school experience; we simply want this incredible collection of faculty, administrators, and staff to be able to continue providing an excellent and rewarding learning experience for our students, and to be fairly compensated for their work.

My daughter learned about MSSM from a student in our town who was already attending and became more interested after MSSM was invited to present their program to the eighth graders. Her class was told cost of attendance would be covered like any other public and private school; this did not seem surprising, given that the cost looked similar to the tuition at local high schools, other Maine school districts do cover this cost, and our town had

covered it the last time a student attended. It was only in February of that academic year, after students had worked hard at submitting their applications, we learned that the town would not cover *any* of the cost of attendance. As you can imagine, this surprised and confused everyone involved, and created a lot of stress for prospective students and their families. After of hours of research, phone calls, emails, meetings, and letter writing over the course of two months, I did some digging through our town's School Board Policies and Procedures; unbeknownst to our current administration and board, our town had a Magnet School Program Policy specifically for MSSM, stating that our town will pay up to the current year local share of the state average tuition rate. This was welcome news, but still left prospective students scrambling to find/confirm funding to cover the remaining \$5,000+ within days of the due date for enrollment contracts. Two months of stress and negotiation could have been easily avoided if there were a clear state-wide policy around this issue.

Maine School of Science and Mathematics is an incredible place. Please don't let it die a slow death by attrition, which is a real possibility if funding remains flat. Maine towns have an obligation to provide equitable access to enriched educational opportunities for students who need them; I believe this means that *all* Maine students should have equitable access to attend the state's only public magnet school, even those students who can't afford to pay the In State cost of attendance. I respectfully urge you to pass this act to ensure that Maine School of Science and Mathematics can continue to provide a world-class education for Maine's brightest students, and to bring that experience within financial reach of more families.

Thank you very much for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eliza J Meyer". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large 'E' and a stylized 'M'.

Eliza Meyer