

April 24, 2023

Public Hearing for LD 871 - *An Act to Provide Support for the Maine Discovery Museum's Informal Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education Programs Throughout the State*

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the committee,

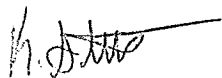
My name is Kim Stewart, of Bangor, and I am testifying today in support of LD 871 - *An Act to Provide Support for the Maine Discovery Museum's Informal Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education Programs Throughout the State*. I am here in two capacities today: both as an employee of the Maine Discovery Museum and as a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at the University of Maine, studying how early science experiences serve as pathways to higher education.

I want to share a story with you today that I think illustrates the importance of informal STEM education programs like the Maine Science Festival (MSF). As part of the MSF we host a field trip day for middle school students every year where we bring roughly 350 7th and 8th graders from across the state together for a day of hands-on activities and workshops where they have opportunities to interact with professionals and researchers from across the spectrum of STEM fields. They have opportunities to experience everything from augmented reality, to coding robots, to wound care, to the intersection of science and art, to bridge building; we've got it all. We want them to see that while science can be wearing a white coat in a lab, it can also be so many other things! We want them to see that all sorts of people can be scientists. Our presenters represent folks from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, genders, age ranges, levels of expertise, and other backgrounds.

In 2022, one of the hands-on activities included a large poster where students could write their answers to questions, creating a real-time word cloud. One question asked who is your favorite scientist? Among answers such as Bill Nye and Neil deGrasse Tyson was also the answer "future me." That is the power of informal STEM education - making connections between students and the real-world STEM opportunities we have here in Maine. At the Maine Science Festival, students are exposed to opportunities they would never be able to experience in a formal classroom setting and they can be inspired to see themselves as scientists.

According to the Maine DECD's ten-year economic development strategy, we need to grow our workforce by at least 75,000 people by the year 2029 and one of the strategies for doing so is by growing our local talent. The Maine Science Festival helps the state to achieve that goal. With annual state funding, which LD 871 would provide, the Maine Discovery Museum would be able to make an even larger impact on STEM education in Maine and would provide important work to strengthen the pipeline to higher education and workforce for Maine students. Given the changing economic landscape in Maine and the goals of the economic development strategy, I encourage you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 871. Show Maine students that we are invested in their futures and help prepare them for the growing career opportunities they will have when they enter the workforce.

Thank you for your time and your consideration,



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