

## Testimony in Favor of LD 1458

Good Morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Luke Shorty, I live in Winthrop, Maine. I come before you today, not as a former teacher or former executive director of the Maine School of Science and Mathematics, but as a citizen of the State who happens to be a member of the third graduating class of MSSM in 1998. Prior to attending MSSM, I had never been North of Bangor, Maine. Living and attending Maine's first magnet school in Limestone is one of, if not the most transformative and life changing event of my life.

It is here that I met students from all over the State of Maine from a variety of demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. I met children of lobsterman from the rugged coast of Washington County, children of homesteaders from the Western Mountains of Franklin County, children of Franco-American families from Aroostook County and Lewiston and from Maine's largest city, Portland. It gave me a clear understanding of the diversity of backgrounds and challenges that families were facing all over our home State.

It is here that I learned humility in getting my first failing grade ever in my life and that I was not defined by my grades, but how I reacted and responded to my failures. Here is where I came to understand the values of a meritocracy, where one's hard-work, dedication, and healthy academic competition, creativity, and dialogue can help form one's life philosophy and ambitions.

It is here, when the future of MSSM was in question, that the director of the school at the time, Dr. Jim Patterson, communicated in no uncertain terms that the people of the State of Maine were investing in us and in our futures and there will come a day where we will be able to pay that investment forward and give back to the State that had given us so much. This message has been like a guidepost for me in my adult years. It is one of the reasons I went back to MSSM as a math teacher and ultimately applied and took the position as Executive Director of MSSM. It is what guided me to step-up and help a

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small school in Northern Penobscot, Lee Academy, work to find a path forward during difficult and trying financial times. Even now it guides me in my work at Thomas College as the Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives and in my volunteer work as commissioner and chair-elect of Maine's Commission for Community Service. I owe so much to the people of the State of Maine for providing my family the opportunity to afford my education at the Maine School of Science and Mathematics and it is in my service and commitment to this State and its people that guides my professional actions.

Those of you serving on this committee understand more than most, that Education is a long-term investment. It is not the investment that returns short-term gains, but it is an investment that matures and pays back dividends over decades, and generations. It is the top investment that can be made to improve the most important asset of any society, its future human capital. It is true that many MSSM alumni have left the State and are working throughout the country. Do not think of this as a loss for Maine, but as an opportunity. I am confident that my testimony on the amazing community and network that is developed at MSSM is not unique to me. To have alumni at MSSM living and working in Maine with connections to their classmates working for Space X, Google, Wall Street, and other multi-national companies is an asset that could be useful in helping develop new business and economic opportunities to the State if this alumni network were leveraged strategically. The pioneer class of MSSM that graduated in 1995 is just now coming into professional maturity. With this maturity the State now finds itself in a position to start collecting data on the return on their investment in 1995.

The financial operation model of MSSM has changed dramatically since I was working there. The global pandemic has had an impact on international recruitment (one of the many sources of revenue that the school enjoyed pre-pandemic). Using the straight cost model for room and board, the cost to attend MSSM is approaching ten thousand dollars. This alone can be a barrier of entry to families whose socioeconomic status would make this unaffordable for them. These students and families deserve to attend Maine's public magnet school just as much as those families that have the means to afford the

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cost of room and board. We know one of the strongest correlating factors of upward social mobility is a high-quality education and the cost of room and board at MSSM becomes a barrier to many families who just can't afford that level of investment. I personally worry that if my family, originally from Fairfield Center, had to decide to send me to MSSM that they would not be able to afford it. As a first-generation student where MSSM was critical to my ability to find success in college this breaks my heart.

LD 1458, helps remove barriers for families to have choice in the education their children receive, it will help upgrade tired facilities and retain talented educators and key staffing positions, and it helps MSSM continue to thrive as one of the best public schools in the State and in the Nation. I thank you for your time and urge you to support LD 1458 for passage. I will answer any questions you may have at this time.