

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Jeff Candura and I am the Development Director for the MSSM Foundation, a 501(c)3 set up alongside the Maine School of Science and Mathematics with the goal of supporting the school, and its faculty, staff, and students.

I am here on behalf of the Board of the MSSM Foundation – made up of MSSM alumni, parents, and friends – to urge your support for LD1458.

The statute that established MSSM allows for a scholarship and educational enhancement fund – the MSSM Foundation. The statute also clearly states that those private funds raised “may not be used to offset, reduce or eliminate the appropriation of state funds” and “may not reduce or eliminate the State's funding obligations.”

Support for MSSM from donors has been strong and continues to increase as alumni age and become more established in their careers. In the last school year alone, the MSSM Foundation has transferred almost \$100,000 in private donations to the school for purposes including: professional development for faculty and staff, the purchase of new classroom equipment, student travel to competitions, the establishment of a summer bridge program for incoming students, the development of an updated website, physical improvements to the dorm, and student financial aid. We expect to transfer a greater amount of funds in the next school year.

The need for private donations is growing at MSSM, and we at the Foundation are more than happy to work to fill that need. But our work is increasingly blurring the line between enhancing the academic experience and “reducing the State's funding obligations.”

There is only so much that philanthropy can do – the State must take the lead.

MSSM is a jewel in the crown of Maine. Over the last decade plus it has been ranked, by several measures, as one of the best public schools, not just in the state of Maine, but in New England, and the Country. In the 2022 school year, MSSM students hailed from all 16 of Maine's counties. MSSM students and alumni often talk about arriving at MSSM and "finding their place." A place where their academic achievements are celebrated, where they are challenged, where expectations for them are high, and support for their endeavors is unwavering. MSSM should be rightfully lauded as one of the state's great achievements. Instead, it can often feel like we are forgotten.

Except for a one-time pandemic related allocation, MSSM's state subsidy has been flat since 2017. If this bill is not approved and funded, MSSM is slated to continue to receive the same level of funding through 2025. That would be extraordinarily damaging. No other school in the state has had to operate under these circumstances. School districts around Maine are currently submitting budgets to their cities and towns – most of them with large increases. Here are some of the increases according to news reports: MSAD75 - 6.5%; Westbrook 9.6%; RSU1 - 3.6%; SAD51 - 7%; Camden Hills Regional High School - 17.26%; SAD44 - 10.39%. I could go on. Again, this is just a single year's increase – MSSM has not seen an increase in five years. MSSM has no municipality it can go to to request additional funds, it has no voters it can appeal to. It only has you. It is up to the State to support MSSM.

The flat state subsidy, at a time when all fixed costs have increased, has put an incredible burden on MSSM faculty and staff and has impacted enrollment. Too often administrators need to focus on how to keep the doors open rather than having the freedom to innovate and push the educational envelope. This bill would help return our state subsidy to a reasonable level.

This bill also requests an elimination of room and board fees for Maine students. Room and Board at MSSM is currently \$9,800. While financial aid is available, many students and families around Maine will hear that sticker price and immediately turn away. MSSM is meant to serve all Maine families, no matter their background. This room and board fee is putting attending MSSM out of reach for too many and I have no doubt that if this bill passes you will see enrollment at MSSM grow and diversify.

Yet, even with these headwinds, MSSM has remained a top performing school and an economic engine for the state of Maine. While MSSM graduates routinely attend top ranked colleges and universities around the country, 33% of college bound graduates in the last five years stayed in state for higher education, with the #1 school for applications, acceptances, and attendances being the University of Maine at Orono. I think you will be struck as you listen or read through testimony provided in support of this bill how many folks connected with MSSM attended UMaine, stayed in Maine, or returned to Maine. At a time when the state is stressing the importance of STEM education, and STEM jobs, you have the opportunity in front of you to support the best STEM school in the region. With hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in developing a STEM workforce, you have the incubator for that workforce sitting in Limestone waiting for your support. MSSM students graduate ready to contribute to our state,

creating more of them can only be a net positive for our state. MSSM is Maine's High School. Let's treat it as such.

I have spent most of my career in educational fundraising. I have done so because I believe that education is the greatest social mobilizer available to us. If we have any chance of solving the problems of the future, we need to start by providing those who will shape the future a strong education now. Many of the future leaders of our state are in Limestone at MSSM. On behalf of the MSSM Foundation Board of Directors, I strongly urge you to pass LD1458 and work with your colleagues to fully fund the bill.

Thank you.