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Testimony in Support of LD 1458
“An Act to Increase Funding for the Maine School of Science and Mathematics”

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Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Troy Jackson and I have the honor of serving as Senate President representing the good people of Aroostook County in the Maine Legislature. I’m here today to introduce LD 1458, “An Act to Increase Funding for the Maine School of Science and Mathematics.”

It is a privilege to represent the Maine School of Science and Mathematics in Limestone. The school is an incredible resource to the students and families of our state. The institution provides students with a world-class public education in the middle of rural Aroostook County. Supporting this institution and all it has to offer should be a priority. This bill represents a concerted effort to make up for a flat funding model in place since 2017 that has made it challenging for the school to maintain the holistic programming that has garnered national recognition.

While the quality of education for students attending MSSM remains top-notch, the school is struggling to offer competitive wages, as well as attract and retain support staff within existing budget resources. At a residential school where students are often far from home and away from their traditional support systems, having adequate mental health and other support professionals available is even more important.

The struggle of ensuring Maine’s schools are fully funded is not unique to MSSM. However, unlike other schools in the State, operational funding for MSSM comes from the Governor’s budget, Department of Education, and the State Legislature as opposed to SAUs, charter schools, and higher education, which have predictable and increasing annual allocations. This means that the Legislature must take action to amend the situation. I know that Sam Critchlow, the school’s Executive Director, is working hard on many fronts to do additional fundraising from alumni and families of the school to help close funding gaps. However, appropriately funding MSSM – a public school – remains the duty of the Legislature. This bill proposes both

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structural changes to the way we would fund MSSM, as well as one-time funding to alleviate some of the immediate challenges presented by the current flat-funding rate.

I know that many of the people speaking after me will be able to speak more personally to the impact that MSSM has had on them, as well as the work they are doing now and why the proposed legislation is important not just to MSSM, but to our entire state.

Thank you for your time this morning and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.