

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Joel Pike, and I am a resident of Jay where I live with my wife Kathleen, and where we have raised our five children. I am here today to submit testimony in support of LD 2118, An Act to Provide Funding to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics as Amended.

I am an Electrical Engineering graduate of the University of Maine and am very active in supporting education and STEM learning around Maine and beyond. I am member of the MSSM Board of Trustees after having been nominated by the Governor and confirmed twice through the legislative process. I also am on the local school board for RSU 73 as well as a member of Board for the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance.

My family has a long background with MSSM dating back to 2010 when our oldest daughter attended her first Summer Camp. She has since graduated from MSSM in 2017 and our oldest son just graduated in 2022. Through all of these years, our family has been an active supporter and promoter of the school around the State at open houses, parent information sessions, and through our activities associated with various student robotics events.

As I stand before you, I am the only Board of Trustee member that has a student attending MSSM with two of our children currently attending. Our youngest daughter is currently a third year Junior, and our youngest son is a first year Freshman. I do not speak on behalf of the MSSM Board of Trustees but will share my personal thoughts and observations as I have at previous public Board meetings. I bring the perspective of a parent who has had a chance to be well connected to the internal workings of the school over a long period of time through my children. I've submitted previous testimony for LD 1458 that you can refer to in regards to the school that I will not duplicate here.

The key message that I will speak to today is that the State needs to determine if it truly has a long-term goal of having a Magnet Math and Science High School. For my eldest daughter's senior year, MSSM was ranked the number two public high school in the country. Since then, I have watched various changes year after year that were primarily a result of what decodes down to a pattern of reduced financial support. If there is a long-term goal for the school, the State must have a model that supports MSSM starting now with a path to the future and that path cannot be periodic one-time supplements or Lucy with the football possibilities. In 2021, the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature issued a joint resolution reaffirming the importance to Maine of having MSSM and it being in Limestone but did not setup any form of a funding model for the school and as such, it continues with the same base funding.

In these comments, I do use the term "State" as it is ultimately the State of Maine that determines the ability for the school to operate and grow. ~~MSSM's funding is set outside of the normal school funding formula which is the right option.~~ MSSM is not like the typical local and regional schools that receive a portion of their funding from the State with the ability supplement that from their local communities. I have now seen a combination of funding that is set by the Department of Education through the Governor's submitted budget as well as by direct action by the Legislature. This dichotomy of funding could be contributing to the lack of changes to the base funding for the school which results in no specific effort to make sure that MSSM has what it requires to remain the school that it has shown that it can be.

MSSM is directed by Statute to reach all parts of the State. This requires an active process of finding the "Mission Appropriate" students and has been much more complex over these past few years. The Summer camp for Middle School students that MSSM operates is one method to achieve that goal but the school also needs to do significant outreach to the State. I encourage you to look at the demographic data of the school in regards to representation around the State. My family is from a rural county, but we live on the southern edge of it. There are many parts of the State that do not have ready access to the high level of academics that is offered by MSSM. I encourage you each to think about the offerings around you with the thought that I'm from Jay that is just West-North-West from here and only one member of this Committee is from a town further North than me.

I have seen many of the new school buildings and other schools that now with more academic offering as well as I've looked at all of the various opportunities with Early College, AP, and other remote learning methods that have grown over the years that MSSM has been in operation. None of them come close to the immersive learning that MSSM is providing for some of the Top Students in the State. In the end, it is a self selecting group with many factors influencing each prospective student and their family to consider and ultimately attend MSSM. As part of the budgeting process for this academic year, MSSM raised the in-State tuition rate and crossed the \$10,000 threshold. As part of this years proposed budget is looking to increase that even further. I have seen over the years how this "price tag" impacts prospective students and how even the possibility of financial aid is still not enough. How do we quantify that missed opportunity for each of those students for what they could become?

MSSM is a public boarding High School and as such it needs to have much more in place as far as student supports and services. Everyone knows how much the cost of everything has changed over these past few years, yet MSSM has been trying to keep within the tight constraints of their budget. There continues to be reductions in staff and course offerings while shifting required roles onto fewer and fewer people. As the funding from the State holds constant while the costs of everything continues to rise, the amount left for the main mission of the school – the education and support of the students – shrinks. Keep in mind that part of the funding MSSM receives is the payment of the lease for the Academic Building that is now leased from the town of Limestone. Every year as that lease increases, it is taking financial support away from MSSM to become an additional subsidy from the State to the town of Limestone. The school continues to cut and dig deeper year after year and even now is being asked to dig deeper. In my opinion, someone needs to determine if the school is being pushed to the point where it needs to put a headstone by the hole it's been digging and call it a grave.

I apologize for talking so bluntly, but the State needs to recognize the impact on MSSM and the students there today. I go back to my key point of if there is a long term plan to have and support MSSM. There are two options – Yes or No. I encourage you ensure that whatever Legislation is put in place is part of a plan to provide the necessary funding for the school now with a plan for the long term that truly does benefit the entire State. This Amended bill is a step in the right direction but I encourage you to put more in place.

I thank all of you as members of this committee for reviewing this testimony and for your careful consideration of this matter.

**Joel E. Pike**