



PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF LD 823

May 5, 2025

**An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Provide for Statewide and Equitable Access to
Experiential Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Competition Programs**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

**Submitted by Michael McKernan, Director, Government and Community Relations,
The Jackson Laboratory**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Michael McKernan. I am Director of Government and Community Relations at The Jackson Laboratory and a resident of Bar Harbor. I am pleased to testify in **support** of this bill, which if enacted, will help Maine high school students explore their interests and use science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and computer science to solve real world problems in their local communities.

The Jackson Laboratory is an independent, nonprofit, biomedical research institution based in Bar Harbor. As many of you know, a major focus of The Jackson Laboratory's mission is to educate the next generation of STEM professionals. This includes biomedical scientists who are focused on solving problems in human disease, veterinarians, physicians, data scientists, genetic counselors, and STEM-educated students in fields like business, law, logistics, and communication.

Experiential education, which is at the heart of this bill, is how we teach and is how our students learn at The Jackson Laboratory. Few learning methods can match experiential learning in its ability to capture a student's interest and simultaneously build both subject matter knowledge and the skills needed to complete a project. JAX internships, apprenticeships, postdoctoral fellowships, even graduate school, are all taught almost exclusively hands-on, with the student pursuing their own research question with guidance from a mentor.

JAX places such a high value on this hands-on experience that in late 2010, when the Maine Principal's Association was unable to continue to offer the Maine State Science Fair, JAX stepped in to help ensure the program's future. MMSA partnered with JAX in 2014, and this year, the two organizations marked their 11th year of joint leadership of the Maine State Science Fair. While our organizations intend the partnership to continue, it is our strong belief that statewide programs like the Maine State Science Fair should have the opportunity to compete for state grant funding, especially when the goals of the programs advance other statewide initiatives or promote participation in heritage industries or high growth sectors, such as those described in the Maine Innovation Economy Action Plan.

This bill also helps to connect student interest to the education and training needed to access STEM careers. A strength of this bill is the criteria that programs must "demonstrate a plan to maintain a formal partnership with the University of Maine System to provide high school

students increased access to college-level courses and consideration for scholarship opportunities." This year, the Maine State Science Fair awarded over 30 college scholarships through University of Maine System partners, led by The University of Maine, which awarded 10 four-year full-tuition scholarships, and the University of Southern Maine, which awarded 7 four-year full-tuition scholarships.

I strongly support other elements of this bill including that funded programs are made available to students in each of Maine's 16 counties, and to all schools including public (including Career and Technical Education Centers), private, and to students who are homeschooled.

I ask the committee to vote LD 823 "ought to pass".