

LD 1740 Testimony of Hannah Varnum

Good morning. My name is Hannah Varnum, I'm a resident of Verona Island and I'm here to testify on LD 1740, An Act to Establish the Maine Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics Matching Grant Program. I believe this act could provide astronomical support to all those eligible. I want to start by establishing that I am an alumni and current mentor of First Robotics Competition Team 6329: The Bucks' Wrath out of Bucksport, Maine.

Though the robotics program at Bucksport High School does teach students about the world of Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics, it also teaches them so much that often goes unnoticed. Business. Entrepreneurship. Leadership. Teamwork. Communication Skills. Marketing and Branding. Fundraising. Budgeting. Community Outreach. And so, so much more.

When I joined Bucksport's robotics team my freshman year, I was shy and timid. I didn't like talking in front of people, and I *never* would have stood up to speak in a room like this, regardless of the reason. This program helps students develop public speaking skills that are hard to come by otherwise. By the end of my senior year, this program had pushed me out of my comfort zone in every way until eventually that became my comfort zone.

As a mentor on the team now, I get to see things from a whole different light. I see the connections form between the kids as the season progresses. I see how the program helps them make new friends that they might not have crossed paths with otherwise. I see the connections the students make with other students on other teams all across not just the country, but the entire world. I see the fear and excitement on their faces as we take kids on a plane for the first time. I see the light in their eyes when the robot comes completely together and works properly for the first time. I see the tears of joy when we win a competition. I hear the laughter at the dinner table and on the walk back to the hotel. I hear the music blaring in the shop and everyone singing along, students and mentors alike.

This robotics program is more than a team for us. We live and breathe robotics, and it's not because we have to. It's because we truly *love* it. None of this would be possible without the help of sponsorships, grants, and bills such as the one presented here today. So support LD 1740. These students are our future. Give them the opportunity to pave their own paths.