

May 5, 2025

Statement on LD 1740: STEAM Grant Program

As a member of the parents' committee for FIRST robotics team 172 The Northern Force, I urge you to pass LD 1740, the STEAM grant program. This state grant program would be a catalyst for growth in hands-on, project-based science, engineering, technology, and math opportunities for students. Given limited state budget resources, this grant could leverage the innovative work and investments being made by students, coaches, mentors, and parents to expand STEM opportunities.

The Northern Force robotics team helped to create the STEM Coliseum facility at the Maine Mall. The STEM Coliseum serves over 35 communities, offering a location for high school robotics teams from across southern Maine, a middle school Lego League, and other innovative STEM programs serving students across the state.

The STEM Coliseum is a great example of how state funding can expand access to regional and statewide STEM programs that would not be possible for an individual community to fund. This aggregation of STEM programming also facilitates partnerships with businesses and higher education institutions to enable Maine students to gain skills, knowledge, and experience relevant to career and college.

These programs rely on volunteer mentors and coaches who bring a wealth of STEM experience and knowledge to their work with students. By using a shared facility and pooling our resources, we can provide broader access to high-end machinery and associated training, mentoring, a shared robotics field, and spaces for collaboration.

As you develop the parameters of the grant program, I urge you to consider the importance of scale, and to prioritize applications from projects that serve multiple communities.

The power of the STEM Coliseum is that it pools resources, people, high-end machinery, and equipment that would not be possible for individual teams to purchase and maintain. In addition, after the pandemic, it has been hard to bring back the level of parental and community engagement in many aspects of our communities and schools. By serving multiple communities, the STEM Coliseum brings people together and creates strong connections and collaboration across different communities.

We encourage you to fund this grant opportunity to expand learning opportunities for Maine students. Thank you.

Kristan Van Hook

Parents Committee Member

The Northern Force FIRST Robotics Team/STEM Coliseum