

Written testimony in support of An Act to Establish the Maine STEAM Matching Grant Program
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Good morning/afternoon Committee Members,

My name is Noah Lacorazza, and I'm a high school student from Madison. I am a proud member of Team 2648, Infinite Loop, a student driven robotics team from Oakland that competes in the FIRST Robotics Competition. I'm here today to speak in strong support of the act to establish the Maine STEAM Matching Grant Program.

This program is more than robots. At its core, this program is about possibility—about giving students the chance to discover who they are and what they're capable of becoming. FIRST, and adjacent programs are meticulously designed to foster growth in STEAM fields. In addition to the technical education it offers, this program also creates opportunities for students, parents, mentors, and volunteers to grow and develop interpersonal skills.

Not only does FIRST help educate the future of Maine's workforce, it also gives an opportunity for applied learning unlike most subjects that are taught in school. The application of physics, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, and computer science—among other fields—on a tangible machine with countless variables provides those involved with a grounded, real-world perspective on the challenges faced in the workforce and every-day life.

Never once has the FIRST community seen me as anything less than capable, despite my physical disability. Missing a hand has never held me back in life—but in FIRST, it's never even mattered. While the world may focus on what others can't do, FIRST has always given me the chance to show what I can do—how my strengths, my mind, and my determination can contribute just as powerfully as anyone else's. And in doing so, FIRST has shown me that my worth isn't defined by what I lack, but by what I offer.

The FIRST program has not only strengthened my education, but it has helped me grow into a more complete and capable person. Through hands-on learning and real-world challenges, I've developed not just as a student, but as a friend who supports others, a leader who listens and inspires, a teacher to not only my teammates, but my peers and community as well, and a future member of Maine's workforce ready to take on complex problems with confidence and collaboration. FIRST didn't just teach me skills—it helped shape my character.

Without FIRST and its community, my future would be very different. I walked into the program a doe-eyed 8th-grader, without any knowledge in regard to how to build a robot. I am now walking out with more confidence in myself than I ever could have imagined. FIRST

single-handedly shaped my plans for the future. Without FIRST, I would have never discovered my vast interest for computer science and its related fields. Which I will be studying at UMaine Orono this coming academic year.

FIRST teams' largest struggles are often monetary. Even established teams often face financial struggles over the duration of their life. Teams making an attempt to find their footing often struggle to maintain their pace. Obtaining funding in our rural communities can prove to be challenging at best, and futile at worst.

Thank you for your time.