



Susan Bernard
Senator, District 1

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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Augusta, Maine 04333

LD 2008, "An Act to Provide Funding to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics and Clarify Sending School Administrative Unit Obligation"
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Public Hearing
January 29, 2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

I am Senator Sue Bernard; I represent 37 communities in Northern Aroostook County which comprise District 1. I am here today in strong support of LD 2008, "An Act to Provide Funding to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics and Clarify Sending School Administrative Unit Obligations."

Since its inception in 1995, the Maine School of Science and Mathematics has provided an exemplary education to many students from across the State of Maine. Most recently, it ranked as the number one best public high school, best public-school teachers, and best college prep public school in Maine on the Niche.com ratings. MSSM's faculty were also ranked 6th best nationwide by Niche.com. MSSM's record of success draws students from all over our state for a unique educational experience and academic rigor.

As a Senator with a rural constituency, I understand the value that MSSM has, especially for towns without a high school or school district. Last year we suggested amending LD 1011 to clarify the obligations a sending district has, but ultimately that did not end up happening. I mentioned that current statute does not clearly state what a sending school is responsible for regarding compensation for MSSM. The lack of clarity in statute has led to differences in how sending districts compensate the school. LD 2008 specifies this cost includes the amount of room and board.

In their report to the legislature, MSSM notes that room and board costs are a significant factor keeping students in our state outside of The County and the Southern Maine Coast from enrolling. While MSSM has worked to solve this problem through allocating revenues from the State's general fund to financial aid, this model is unsustainable.

Because the school has focused funds on financial aid, it has had to defer maintenance on projects. Now, many facilities must be renovated. The school is asking for funding from the State in addition to clarifying the obligations for sending districts to address this immediate need. Without these funds, the environment surrounding MSSM's success is at risk. One of these projects includes funding for the school's dormitory, the place where each student spends time living. I am sure that we all have an experience seeing an under maintained dormitory, perhaps

we lived in one in college, or our children had to live in one. For most of these High Schoolers, it is their first time away from home. I think funding necessary upgrades to dorm infrastructure is a good use of one-time funds to provide a better environment for studying.

Finally, investing in the Maine School of Science and Mathematics is an investment in the economy of The County. MSSM employs 38 people, contributes \$445,000 in rent to Limestone, spends \$100,000 dollars annually with Aroostook vendors. Additionally, Students of MSSM have contributed over 250 hours of service to the local community.

For these reasons I urge you to vote ought to pass.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to take any questions.