

Good day Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rob Constantine and I am the current Executive Director of the Maine School of Science and Mathematics. I am here today for a couple of reasons - first to answer any questions you may have on the School's annual report or in general about the state of the School. I recognize that there is a great deal of information in our annual report and that you may not have had a chance to review it thoroughly so I am also happy to return at your convenience to answer those questions at another time.

Second, I would like to express my support for LD2008 and share some of the lived experience on campus that this bill would address. LD2008 addresses three on-going challenges at the School - a lack of clarity around responsibilities of full school choice districts, a funding model that has resulted in static operating funding for 9 years, and deferred maintenance of state facilities as a result of that flat funding.

Current statute lays out expectations of full choice sending school districts for just about every case they could face...except MSSM. Title 20A, Section 5805 includes specific direction on tuition calculation for other public schools and private schools. It specifically mentions MSSM...but provides no guidance for calculating sending district responsibility. While some districts do pay toward the costs of attending MSSM, others pay nothing. It is a little embarrassing that I was able to receive tuition from sending Maine towns when I worked at a private school in NH...but sometimes do not as the director of Maine's public magnet school. This past admission cycle we worked with a family in a sending district that at first indicated they wouldn't pay anything toward MSSM (though they would have paid an even higher amount for the student to attend a nearby private school). This was late in the cycle after all of our available financial aid funds were allocated. While the district's school board eventually made the decision to pay, the lack of clarity created a great deal of confusion and stress for the family.

Throughout my tenure I have come before you to share the success of our students and the challenges of flat-funding. Each year of flat funding actually represents a decreased state's investment in MSSM when the impacts of inflation are taken into account. The request for additional financial aid funds and on-going operating funding are not desired additions - let me be clear that they are merely a way for the state to make some attempt to return to relative funding levels of 10 years ago. Each year, MSSM continues to deliver on our mission and the promise the state made to students and families 30 years ago. But each year it becomes harder and harder to deliver on that promise as our operating funds stretch further and further - eliminating positions, raising room and board, reducing classroom supply budgets, and other measures.

As is often the case when budgets are stretched, MSSM has focused on our students and made the difficult decision to defer maintenance on facilities. Each year the risk of structural or system failure grows - keeping me up at night but also taking limited financial and human resources to address as systems break down. This year one of our 50 year old boilers failed. Fortunately the temperatures were warm enough that we could operate the dorm while we had the boiler fixed...with dollars that detracted from what we could spend on educating our students.

Thank you for your work and for hearing my testimony today. I hope that you will move LD 2008 forward and, even more importantly, I hope that you will encourage your colleagues to fully fund this bill. Unlike other schools that can turn to their local tax base, MSSM has only you to turn to. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.