

January 29, 2026

Public Comment of M. Trey Cox, Esq., Alumni Representative on the MSSM Board of Trustees and resident of Portland, Maine in support of LD 2008.

Good morning Representative Murphy, Senator Rafferty, members of the joint standing committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

My name is Trey Cox, I'm a public defender from Portland, Maine, and I am proud to serve as your appointed alumni representative to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics Board of Trustees, where I chair the Governance Committee.

I care deeply about MSSM, but I don't come to you today as an alumni, but as someone appointed by this body with a fiduciary duty to the school, and as a fiduciary, I want my message to be clear: the current funding model of MSSM is no longer adequate for the school to deliver on the mission this body has charged it with.

In 2016, as you know, we were ranked the 2<sup>nd</sup> best school in the country. Since then, we have faced flat funding. In a normal environment, a year of flat funding is a step backward for any institution. After the inflation this country has experienced over the last decade, this negative effect has been exacerbated.

The Board appreciates the dedication of staff who have seen minimal salary increases since this started, often tracking below yearly inflation. We are appointed by the State, but are becoming embarrassed to force the school administration to continue to develop a budget each year with no increase in funding, and continue to expect our highly-qualified state employees to deliver on a mission so important to the State's future, without showing any financial investment on the part of the State in that mission.

Unlike other school districts who have access to a local tax base, MSSM's only source of funding is the State. It's you.

Our Statute wisely indicates that the school is free of tuition and room and board, so long as sufficient funds have been appropriated. Currently, our funding is far from delivering on that statutory promise. Room and board now sits beyond \$10,000 annually.

This limits access for students, especially those students in financially challenged rural districts where the need for an experience like MSSM is even more important.

Last year, we spent 10% of our state appropriation on financial aid, but even with this investment, we can no longer meet the full aid for families that qualify.

Deserving Maine students are unable to access the quality education that could change their and future generations' trajectories, and better the state as a whole.

Rather than being a tool that erases socio-economic disparities, the room and board we are forced to charge by our funding model becomes another means of concentrating opportunity and furthering those disparities.

In addition to this already-substantial geographic disparity, some districts in the State contribute toward the cost of their students attending MSSM, but others do not.

This places a further burden on families in those districts that may need access to MSSM the most.

It is time that the State recognize the opportunity that MSSM should be providing *all* Maine students, and we humbly request you pass LD 2008, and fund it accordingly, so MSSM can continue to deliver on its mission.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions about MSSM, my experience there, how the school has helped myself and the alumni around me, or any other questions this body sees fit.