

Testimony for the Maine State Legislature, LD 127: “ Resolve, To Establish a Pilot Program To Provide Grants for Professional Development in Computer Science Instruction”

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Date: **2-17-2021**

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My name is Joe Sanderson, and I submit testimony today in support of L.D. 127, a resolution to establish a pilot program to provide grants for professional development in Computer Science instruction. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my input in support of L.D. 127.

As a professional with over 30 years experience in commercial software development, my perspective is from the viewpoint of technical employers in Maine seeking qualified candidates for career openings in Computer Science.

As a former manager and leader of Software Engineering organizations in Maine, I have first-hand knowledge of the challenges facing tech companies in finding qualified candidates for CS jobs in Maine. This shortage has been a problem in my time as a hiring manager and leader, and will continue to get worse unless the state takes significant steps to increase the capabilities of our K-12 schools in preparing students for careers in computer science. This requires training more educators to teach CS, which this legislation will make possible.

I have had openings go unfilled, be moved off-shore or to candidates living outside of Maine because qualified candidates within the state did not exist. This is only one outcome that the continued shortage will produce. For companies looking to grow, the lack of talent makes the decision to stay in Maine more difficult, when geographies to our south have larger pools of available qualified candidates, and more robust feeder programs to continue to increase the number of those candidates.

With the introduction of the Roux Institute in Portland, Maine has received a significant boost in the goal of making Maine a place ripe for growth for existing tech companies, as well as new start-ups that will be spawned from Roux and other programs in Maine. These changes will make the need for qualified candidates for CS jobs even greater than what we see now. The demand for qualified CS candidates is increasing; we must also increase the supply if we wish to realize Maines potential in the tech industry.

In my years working as a software engineer, manager, and leader I have also seen first hand the lack of diversity in the industry. Without expanding the pool of available candidates to female students, students of color, students from rural communities, and students from economically challenged families, we will not create enough CS candidates for the jobs we need to fill to grow CS in Maine. The inequity that has been perpetuated for many years in CS careers must be resolved for the betterment of our State; as Mainers we are better than those who would

exclude opportunities from people because of their gender identity, race, geographic or economic background. As someone who has worked for over 30 years in commercial software development, I can say with certainty that the white male dominated culture has resulted in environments that result in a lack of diversity in thinking and problem solving. That needs to change, and the focus on equity in L.D. 127 will help us make that change.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide input on this important legislation. I am available at any time to discuss this in more detail.

Respectfully,  
Joe Sanderson  
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