

Sean Wasson
Maine Computer Science Teachers Association

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am Sean Wasson, current president of the Maine chapter of the Computer Science Teachers Association and a teacher at Lyman-Moore School in Portland. I am speaking today in support of LD 127 on behalf of CSTA Maine.

The Maine Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA Maine) represents K-12 educators that teach computer science in Maine. We have approximately 100 members spanning all sixteen counties. Our membership primarily consists of educators in K-12 school districts, both rural and urban. Our work is supported by representatives from Maine's higher education institutions, for-profit and non-profit organizations. As a team, we work towards equitable computer science instruction for all Maine students.

With our testimony, we strongly support the passage of LD 127. Computer science is a subject that has infiltrated our daily lives in a myriad of forms. Each of you have multiple devices nearby that exist because of computer science. Computational thinking created things like bluetooth headphones, smartphones, video conference platforms, insulin pumps and the autonomous tractors our farmers use in the county. In short, computer science is everywhere.

Yet, many teachers in Maine are not conversant with computer science and computational thinking. Educators in both rural and urban districts do not have the resources to bring equitable, rigorous computer science to their schools. Computational thinking, where one interweaves data analysis as part of problem solving, is an essential part of every curriculum area now, although we are not here to debate that today.

This bill directs the Maine Department of Education to establish a fund that educates teachers on how to implement high-quality computer science instruction for all students in Maine. As we see in our membership, most computer science teachers have minimal training in computer science pedagogy - almost all were trained in another subject area. That is exactly why we need a fund as suggested in LD 127. Like doctors and lawyers, teachers need continuing education. Professional development is unfortunately one of the first victims of school belt-tightening. Having a state-funded, teacher-supported grant program elevates the urgency for undertaking professional development.

As we read this bill, it allows the state to seek outside funding to complement whatever state funds may be appropriated to this fund. We support this approach.

Computer Science professional development supported by the legislature will validate computer science as an essential subject area for Maine students. LD 127 lays a solid foundation on how/where/what professional development can look like going forward.

For your information, CSTA Maine, and its partners of Code.org, Project>Login, and the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance, have been conducting professional development in computer science for multiple years, but every year, we continue to see demand grow. CSTA Maine membership grows every year and the demand for computer science professional development continues to outstrip what we can supply. CSTA Maine is a chapter of the national CSTA organization which is a 501(c)3 and eligible to receive charitable funds.

In sum, CSTA Maine and its nearly 100 members across all 16 counties of Maine strongly support LD 127.

I am happy to answer any questions you have.

Thank you.