



The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Testimony from Angela Oechsle, Project>Login Program Director,
Educate Maine

In Support Of

L.D. 871 “An Act to Provide Support for Maine Discovery
Museum’s Informal Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Throughout
the State.”

Monday, April 24, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Angela Oechsle and I am the Project>Login Program Director at Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of L.D. 871. Educate Maine’s mission is to ensure that Maine people are prepared to succeed in education and career. We want all Maine people to reach their highest educational and economic potential to power a vibrant, globally competitive Maine economy. Our Project>Login program strives to connect students and adult learners with an interest in computer science or technology to education, training, and employment opportunities. We recognize the importance of STEM education in deeply engaging students at every stage of the education pipeline, teaching them highly sought-after 21st-century skills, and opening doors to exciting, high-wage, in-demand careers.

STEM education represents great potential for supporting economic growth in our state. There are 278,500 Mainers who work in science, technology, engineering, medicine, and math-related careers, far exceeding the demand rate for most other professions. STEM is directly responsible for over 36 percent of Maine’s GDP. And the Bureau of Labor Statistics also forecasts an 11 percent growth in high-skilled STEM careers in the next 12-15 years in the manufacturing, healthcare, and defense sectors. There are currently 2,178 open computing jobs in Maine with an average annual salary of \$81,965. In short, investing in STEM education now will secure a brighter and more prosperous future for Maine’s workforce and economy.

We will not achieve full opportunity for our students in this field nor our future economy without multiple, equitable pathways to access informal STEM education opportunities, especially in our rural, underserved communities, and our educators supporting these student-led projects also need access to high-quality professional development opportunities.

We have partnered with the Maine Discovery Museum and The Maine Science Festival team for years and have witnessed first-hand their approach and expertise in expanding STEM education. Not only are they committed to reaching Mainers across the state, but they are also persistent in ensuring that our rural areas have the same access to informal STEM education as our larger towns and cities. They are filling gaps in elementary science education PD through their Science Teacher Academy and

consistently delivering high-quality STEM education programs locally to meet the needs of our young learners.

Successful STEM education for our young Mainers starts early and informally and continues through partnerships and collaborations with K12 schools, higher education institutions, other nonprofits, STEM associations, businesses, and other community-based organizations. Maine Discovery Museum is the partner to lead and continue this effort by engaging all stakeholders in this important work. I urge you to support this bill.

Respectfully,

Angela S. Oechsle
Educate Maine