

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Joel Pike, and I am a resident of Jay where I live with my wife Kathleen, and where we have raised our five children. I am here today to submit testimony in support of LD 1458, An Act to Increase Funding for the Maine School of Science and Mathematics.

My family has a long background with MSSM back dating back to 2010 when our oldest daughter attended her first Summer Camp. She has since graduated from MSSM in 2017 and our oldest son just graduated in 2022. Our youngest daughter is currently a 2nd year Sophomore, and our youngest son was just accepted to attend as an incoming first year Freshman this fall. Through all of these years, our family has been an active supporter and promoter of the school around the State at a multitude of open houses, parent information sessions, and through our activities associated with various student robotics events.

I am an Electrical Engineering graduate of the University of Maine and am very active in supporting education and STEM learning around Maine and beyond. I have been nominated and confirmed twice and am currently a Board of Trustee member for MSSM. I also am a Director on the local school board for RSU 73 as well as being on the Board of the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance.

I provide this today as a parent and active supporter of MSSM. I will share a series of thoughts for you to consider as you work through this process. In 2021, the 130th Legislature issued a joint resolution reaffirming the importance to Maine of having MSSM and it being in Limestone. LD 1458 builds on that joint resolution to be more than words and to actually provide the much needed financial support to solidify MSSM's future.

I have met so many "Mission Appropriate" potential students around the State over my many years of being associated with the school. Some of these have been fortunate enough to attend a Summer Camp while others we have met away from the school. Unfortunately, only a few would ever get to MSSM. Some went through the admissions process and attended MSSM, but many either didn't even start the application process or backed out. Far too many times, the message that came back was the cost. Yes, MSSM is Tuition Free, it is the only State sponsored Math and Science magnet school in the country that requires families to pay for full Room and Board. This cost is now very close to \$10,000 a school year.

While there is the possibility of financial aid, often families do not seem to want to go through this process or work through multiple appeals. They also may look at the other costs they will have beyond this Room and Board costs which can be quite significant for some families. For many in the State, a trip to Limestone is a day or two off from work, car mileage, and possibly a hotel stay. This is for move in, move out, and the various other times when families want to be on campus. Unlike local schools, MSSM also does not provide laptops to the students, so each student has to acquire some form of computer in order to fully participate in classes.

Maine is a rural state and there are students all around that should be attending MSSM as it provides a level of education far different than many sending schools. While there are various

options available to students to attend college classes while in High School, that is not always possible for the most rural areas and none of them provide the immersive learning environment that they will find at MSSM. It should be the mission of the state to ensure every potential student has a chance to attend and to not worry about the costs.

As a local school board member, I see how our district as well as others nearby prepare their budgets and what the state funding helps to cover and how that differs for how the current statute require MSSM to charge families. Local schools must transport their students to and from school each day while MSSM does contract buses to move students up and down state around breaks, but this function has fallen under Room and Board to be charged to the families. Local schools are now feeding their students breakfasts and lunches during the school days but are also providing meals outside of school days as well. This is all at no costs to the local students while at MSSM, food has historically been charged within the Room and Board fees as all meals need to be provided while the students are on campus.

At local schools, we are seeing more and more supports being put in place for the students to help develop and care for them outside of the academic environment. For MSSM, much of this is provided by the Residential Instructors (RI's) but again, they are mostly supported by Room and Board charges. And for these highly motivated students, even more social and mental health supports need to be offered beyond what is in place currently. I along with two other Trustees researched and helped develop a report on Student Wellness several years ago that led to the identification of many needs to be provided for the students and to date, not all of them have been able to be met.

As we all know too well, the costs of everything has been rising over these recent years and that is impacting every aspect of an operating school. For local schools, they have been increasing their budgets in order to accommodate this as well as just following the increasing salaries and benefits. For MSSM, it has continued to cut and squeeze to unsustainable levels trying to stay operational and provide for the students. This is as there has been no changes in base funding for the school for many years even with ongoing discussions of financial issues in Board meetings with the DOE board representative in attendance.

I have had the opportunity to watch so many students progress through MSSM and see most of them stay through and graduate. They are so well prepared for their next learning opportunity and life in general. I ask that you support LD 1458 to increase funding to the school while also eliminating the Room and Board fees as a critical step to return MSSM back to being one of the top High Schools in the Nation and to truly make MSSM available to every "Mission Appropriate" student in Maine.

I thank President Jackson for presenting this bill and all other Senators and Representatives that have signed off in sponsoring LD 1458. I also thank all of you members of this committee for reviewing this testimony and for your careful consideration of this matter.

Joel E. Pike