

February 10, 2024

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Committee,

I write today neither for nor against LD 2118, understanding that further amendment may modify this bill and MSSM's quest for sustainable funding. I most recently addressed this committee last session in regards to LD 1458, in an official capacity as the Executive Director of MSSM. The opportunity to serve MSSM's compelling students and staff is what brought me back to the state in 2021. I have since made the difficult decision to move on to a new opportunity out of state, partly informed by the uncertain support I saw for MSSM at the state level. I write now as an alumnus and someone who still believes deeply in MSSM's purpose and potential to transform the lives of Maine's young people.

As you know, the school has been flat-funded through nearly a decade, while virtually all other areas of the commissioner's recommendations and the Governor's budget saw substantial year-over-year increases. Past efforts to correct funding levels have resulted in only one-time allocations. It is impossible to plan strategically for an institution with this level of uncertainty. I applaud Senator Jackson for introducing this and other legislation to provide MSSM with predictable funding and a sustainable future. Regardless of the past, this committee and the legislature play a critical role in securing MSSM's future as a flagship institution for Maine.

In planning for MSSM's continued success, I urge the committee to also consider the ways in which the school *differs* from all other schools and supervisory unions in the state. While the Commissioner's office has methods for calculating typical operational needs for schools, MSSM is atypical in a variety of ways:

1. **The school is fully residential**, by its mission and charter, which entails a variety of additional costs (not all covered by "room and board");
2. **The school serves a unique population** of deeply gifted students, living far from home, whose educational, health, and social/emotional needs exceed those of a typical school population;
3. **The school must attract and retain top-tier educators** with advanced degrees capable of teaching courses at college or graduate level—to do so the school must offer wages and benefits that are competitive with the other opportunities available to such talent;
4. **The school is required by statute to be located in Limestone**, where the only available facilities are aging, expensive, and must be leased in a price-taker market.

I ask the committee, legislature, Commissioner, and Governor to consider these differences, and define a funding formula that attends to these and other needs. MSSM is approaching its 30th year of existence, having changed the lives of thousands of young Mainers for the better. The school changed my life, accelerated my studies, and inspired a career in education. You will doubtlessly hear from many alumni and parents with similar stories. We must ensure these opportunities are available to Maine's next generation of students and future leaders.



Sam Critchlow
Leadville, CO

Sam Critchlow
Leadville, CO
LD 2118

February 10, 2024

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Committee,

I write today neither for nor against LD 2118, understanding that further amendment may modify this bill and MSSM's quest for sustainable funding. I most recently addressed this committee last session in regards to LD 1458, in an official capacity as the Executive Director of MSSM. The opportunity to serve MSSM's compelling students and staff is what brought me back to the state in 2021. I have since made the difficult decision to move on to a new opportunity out of state, partly informed by the uncertain support I saw for MSSM at the state level. I write now as an alumnus and someone who still believes deeply in MSSM's purpose and potential to transform the lives of Maine's young people.

As you know, the school has been flat-funded through nearly a decade, while virtually all other areas of the commissioner's recommendations and the Governor's budget saw substantial year-over-year increases. Past efforts to correct funding levels have resulted in only one-time allocations. It is impossible to plan strategically for an institution with this level of uncertainty. I applaud Senator Jackson for introducing this and other legislation to provide MSSM with predictable funding and a sustainable future. Regardless of the past, this committee and the legislature play a critical role in securing MSSM's future as a flagship institution for Maine.

In planning for MSSM's continued success, I urge the committee to also consider the ways in which the school differs from all other schools and supervisory unions in the state. While the Commissioner's office has methods for calculating typical operational needs for schools, MSSM is atypical in a variety of ways:

The school is fully residential, by its mission and charter, which entails a variety of additional costs (not all covered by "room and board");

The school serves a unique population of deeply gifted students, living far from home, whose educational, health, and social/emotional needs exceed those of a typical school population;

The school must attract and retain top-tier educators with advanced degrees capable of teaching courses at college or graduate level—to do so the school must offer wages and benefits that are competitive with the other opportunities available to such talent;

The school is required by statute to be located in Limestone, where the only available facilities are aging, expensive, and must be leased in a price-taker market.

I ask the committee, legislature, Commissioner, and Governor to consider these differences, and define a funding formula that attends to these and other needs.

MSSM is approaching its 30th year of existence, having changed the lives of thousands of young Mainers for the better. The school changed my life, accelerated my studies, and inspired a career in education. You will doubtlessly hear from many alumni and parents with similar stories. We must ensure these opportunities are available to Maine's next generation of students and future leaders.

Sam Critchlow
Leadville, CO