

Autumn Theriault
Poland
LD 2118

I am so grateful for the opportunity to provide valuable information and insight into the increase in funding for The Maine School of Science through the current bill, LD2118. This high school has completely changed the course of my son's life. This educational institution is a gift to the State of Maine, along with each student that is lucky enough to be accepted and attend. This school is not just a place to learn, but also a place for students to fully immerse themselves in valuable learning experiences directly related to their future chosen career path. My son has been in gifted and talented programs at various public schools since he was in kindergarten. He attended Fiddlehead Charter School in Gray, Maine where he began to find his passion for both science and math. This was also when he heard about The Maine School of Science & Mathematics, in third grade. It was in this grade that he set his sights on this school, and began the hard work to ensure that he would be able to attend. My son is passionate about becoming a biochemist, and has been his entire life. He was the child that would do challenging mathematic problems for fun, build Lego sets for 12 year olds at age 6 and spend hours working with various chemistry kits. When he would take a standardized test, he would score in the 93rd percentile or higher, and thrived when challenged while also continuing to seek out his own challenges. While attending our local middle school, Bruce M. Whittier Middle School in Poland, he worked incredibly hard ensuring that he completed all classes he needed to in order to apply and be accepted to MSSM. This included taking Algebra 2 as an 8th grader at the high school. My son, Nikolias, is a powerful example of the benefits of the financial aid scholarships that MSSM offers to parents like myself who would never be able to afford for our children to attend MSSM on our own. I am a single mother and a 6th grade educator at Elm Street School in Mechanic Falls. Nikolias' father has not been in his life for the last few years, and I have not received any child support to assist in paying for living, as well as educational expenses, for both of my children for many years now. As a 6th grade educator in the State of Maine, along with being a single mother, it would be impossible for my son Nikolias to attend MSSM without a scholarship, as financially it would be impossible for our family. While the tuition is paid for, the cost of room and board would be impossible for us to afford. I cannot express how heartbreaking it is to be the mother of such a brilliant and gifted child while knowing that providing an education like MSSM is financially out of reach. I have worked hard their entire lives to do all I can to help my children achieve any and all goals that they may have for themselves. I have worked hard to provide them everything they need in order to make these goals and dreams ones that they can even create to begin with. I will never forget the day he was accepted into MSSM, and how much pride I felt - or how much it meant to Niko to see his dream finally come true. My heart also sank that same day, knowing that without any financial assistance, I would have to let him know that while he worked so hard - his dream was also currently out of reach. I will also never forget the day I found out that all but \$600 of his room and board would be covered through financial assistance offered to us by MSSM due to our financial circumstances. I remember reading the email and just crying. I could finally tell my son that he was able to attend, and that he was on the path finally to making all of his goals and dreams come true. Nikolias, now a junior, has thrived at MSSM. He has been able to access and succeed with rigorous curriculum that is preparing him for his dream job as a biochemist. He has been able to dig into challenging math courses such as AP Super Calculus. For the first time, he can feel the dreams that he has set out to achieve at a young age, are truly at his fingertips with his own hard work. Without MSSM's financial aid and scholarships, in addition to Maine fully funding his tuition, Nikolias would not be able to attend this incredible school. I will forever be thankful for MSSM making it possible for students, much like my son, to be able to attend and thrive at their institution, removing the monetary barrier that exist for children such as mine. This school is incredibly beneficial to the State of Maine, as well as all of the students who are lucky

to attend and thrive here. The staff is wonderful, the teachers are incredible and I will forever hold MSSM within my heart for how much it has changed my son's life. This bill, if passed, would allow MSSM to look strategically towards a future in terms of providing the children of Maine with a wonderful educational experience for years to come. When we focus on funding our educational institutions, we are allowing the children of the State of Maine to believe that their dreams and goals are possible. I ask that you please pass this legislation which will provide more opportunities for children such as my son - and ensure the long term future of The Maine School of Science and Mathematics. I appreciate your time and consideration.