



Testimony Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Labor and Housing
February 25, 2021

Senators Breen and Rafferty, Representatives Pierce and Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Labor and Housing,

I am Gilda Nardone, Executive Director of New Ventures Maine; I live in Brunswick, and I'm here today to speak on behalf of New Ventures Maine's (NVME) General Fund allocation within the University of Maine System's (UMS) biennial budget request for fiscal years 2022 and 2023 (Page A-489).

As some of you may be aware, the organization was created through state legislation in 1977 as a pilot program, based at the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA), to serve Displaced Homemakers. Our name was later changed to Maine Centers for Women, Work, and Community and, in 2015, to New Ventures Maine to reflect the expanded scope and reach of our services.

Although our services and names have evolved and changed over the past 42 years, our mission has remained constant—to help Maine people succeed in the changing economy and achieve economic security for themselves and their families.

As you are all well aware, the past year has been challenging as our state and nation have been responding to the health, economic, and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because NVME was already delivering some of our classes online, we were able to adapt quickly to offer all of our classes and individual advising virtually statewide at flexible day and evening hours. We provided and partnered with other organizations to ensure that Maine people received the critical services, resources, and support they needed to navigate these uncertain times and begin to plan for a more secure financial future. More specifically, in FY 20, NVME provided comprehensive services in the following ways:

- Helping 632 aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners weather the pandemic and build resilience by providing access to information and resources, business advising, and training and tools for expanding their digital presence and marketing,

Make it happen

- Assisting 241 unemployed and low-wage workers whose jobs were impacted by COVID-19 adjust to the changing job market, retool their skills, set new career goals, and access workforce training and education,
- Helping 415 economically vulnerable individuals and families manage their financial situations by providing financial education and matched savings programs to cover unexpected expenses and other financial goals and assisting them to file their income taxes and access tax credits and economic impact payments.

As our state continues to grapple with the impact of the pandemic and racial, gender, and economic inequities, faces the challenges of our changing demographics and workforce, and moves forward with economic recovery and development, NVME is well positioned to be a valuable resource to adults in work/life transition, for families seeking financial stability, to aspiring entrepreneurs wanting to contribute to their own and their community's economic development, to employers looking for well-trained and qualified employees, and to policymakers looking for creative solutions to building a strong Maine economy.

As a statewide outreach and education program of UMA and the UMS and co-located on many of the campuses and centers of the System, NVME is uniquely positioned to:

- Help adults start or return to college, complete degree and workforce credentials, and successfully transition to the workplace,
- Assist aspiring entrepreneurs to develop a solid business plan, access financing and other resources, and sustain and grow their businesses;
- Help individuals and families develop skills to manage their money, reduce debt, improve their credit, and provide matched savings for emergency needs and future asset goals, such as home and car ownership and repair and business start-up and expansion. This includes our collaboration with CA\$H Maine providing free tax assistance and asset building resources at locations across the state (4,496 tax filers served in 2020).

The state allocation provides a critical 59% of NVME's annual operating budget; the remainder is generated through a combination of foundation grants, federal contracts, individual and business contributions, and fee-for-service activities. This allocation would remain at the current FY 21 level with no additional increase.

We very much appreciate the State of Maine's investment in New Ventures Maine's services. We are proud to be an integral part of our state's workforce and entrepreneurship "ecosystems" and prepared to assist with implementation of Maine's economic recovery and economic development strategies through our role in providing access to and preparing a diverse and educated workforce for careers in high-demand fields, supporting entrepreneurship

and growing small businesses, particularly in rural areas, advancing financial well-being of Maine families, and strengthening partnerships that build a strong and equitable Maine economy in all regions of our state.

We are very disappointed that our Advisory Council isn't able to host you this year at our biennial Reception at The Senator which has traditionally been a great opportunity for Legislators to meet and talk with our graduates about the impact of our services.

One of our graduates, Karen Garland-Kidder from Farmington, isn't able to be before you in person today but will be submitting written testimony. Karen is a graduate of our Career Planning program, an adult learner who graduated with her Associate's Degree in Nursing from UMA, and currently employed as a Clinical Program Coordinator with the Healthy Community Coalition at Franklin Community Health Network giving back to her community during the pandemic through her work and volunteer time, including administering COVID tests and vaccines.

Please do visit our website at newventuresmaine.org to view Karen's and other graduates' success stories and our annual reports. We are happy to be a resource at any time to you and your constituents.

Thank you. I or Samantha Warren are happy to answer any questions now or at the Work Session.

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