



Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Testimony in Support of LD 460

“An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Improve Student Success and Workforce Readiness Within the University of Maine System”

April 26, 2023

Patrick Strauch, Executive Director

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. I'm Patrick Strauch of Exeter and I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Maine Forest Products Council today in support of LD 460, “An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Improve Student Success and Workforce Readiness Within the University of Maine System.”

The Maine Forest Products Council is an organization representing more than 300 members from all facets of the forest products industry. Members include paper mills, sawmills, loggers, truckers, foresters, panel manufacturers, biomass and pellet facilities and secondary manufacturers. We also have more than 8 million acres of dues paying member companies. Our industry contributes more than \$8.1 billion each year to the state's economy, and it supports more than 33,500 direct and indirect jobs.

As an industry, we have worked closely with the University of Maine and other partners through the FOR/Maine collaboration. This collaboration, with strong support from our federal delegation and administration, has focused on research and development and emerging technologies to build resilience in the forest products industry, attract investments and recruit the workforce necessary to fill the projected 5,000 employee gap our industry will face by 2030. The University of Maine's Advanced Structures and Composites Center has been a critical partner in this endeavor, training the next-generation manufacturing workforce while also developing the cutting-edge research necessary to support our evolving industry and move Maine's globally competitive forest economy forward.

An important part of the University's research has been geared towards utilizing our abundant forest resources to reduce our carbon footprint and meet the climate goals of the day. If successful, the bond provided by LD 460 would close the \$58 million funding gap for the Green Engineering and Materials (GEM) Laboratory, allowing the University to break ground on this important project next year. The GEM laboratory presents a tremendous opportunity for Maine to capitalize on new opportunities to add value to our forest resources while solving critical challenges in our state and supporting good-paying jobs in communities that rely on a strong forest economy.

Maine voters have a history of supporting bonds to support innovation in our forest economy. In 2018, they supported a bond for a new dorm and student center at USM that was constructed with cutting edge cross laminated timber (CLT) materials.

For these reasons, the Council strongly supports LD 460 and urges you to vote ‘Ought to Pass’. Let's again give Mainers the opportunity to support critical investments in our forest economy future. Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to provide answers to any questions you may have at the work session.

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Companies represented on the MFPC Board

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Farm Credit East
Fontaine Inc.
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Southern Maine Forestry
Stead Timberlands
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