

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*

From Kara Hay, Penquis President & CEO

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Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and distinguished members of the Committee on Appropriations & Financial Affairs: My name is Kara Hay and I write in support of the important investment in University of Maine System infrastructure proposed by LD 460.

I am a proud University of Maine graduate and the president and CEO of Penquis, a large community action agency in central/northern Maine that serves between 3,500 and 5,000 struggling Mainers every single day. We provide roughly fifty services aimed at ensuring Mainers have access to safe and affordable housing, early childhood education, transportation, family supports and programs that build financial stability.

The University of Maine System and especially UMaine is a critical partner in our efforts, providing affordable education and social mobility, the workforce our agency needs to deliver crucial services to thousands of individuals each day, and research-informed solutions to the challenges that confront the population we serve.

Recently, Penquis has been closely collaborating with UMaine's Advanced Structures & Composites Center (ASCC) to support their innovative work to transform housing construction methods in Maine and across the nation while addressing the state's housing crisis.

Thanks to Congressionally Directed Spending secured for Penquis by Sen. Angus King and funding from KeyBank Foundation and NeighborWorks America, our organization and MaineHousing are working with UMaine ASCC to create a first-in-the-nation bio-based 3D-printed neighborhood. This project scales up UMaine's pioneering BioHome3D technology that was publicly unveiled in late 2022 and has attracted state, national and international interest. The neighborhood will be located in the Greater Bangor area and consist of nine homes made entirely from Maine wood waste, providing housing for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

You are well aware of our state's housing availability and affordability crisis. One of the greatest challenges is the cost and slow pace of housing construction. This project is investigating ways to create units more quickly and inexpensively, as well as more sustainably, so that the technology can eventually be implemented at scale by private sector partners.

To deliver this project, UMaine needs to build the Green Engineering & Materials Factory of the Future (GEM), a first-of-its-kind research and learning environment in next-generation large-scale digital manufacturing technology. The new facility would have an entire bay devoted to affordable housing innovation and would allow for the nine homes to be 3D printed in phases, allowing time to evaluate and modify the home's design based on housing performance, cost and feedback from the homes' occupants. The goal is to solve key technical hurdles, optimize the home's design and minimize cost in order to make this new type of construction commercially viable.

We understand UMaine would receive \$58 million from LD 460, *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Improve Student Success and Workforce Readiness Within the University of Maine System*. A large portion of that would be dedicated by the university to GEM, closing the funding gap that remains and allowing for groundbreaking in 2024. For this reason, we urge your support of this investment. We are excited about the potential of this landmark project to create new opportunities for the state's economy and Maine-made solutions to our affordable housing crisis. Thank you.