

Testimony by MaineHealth

In Support of L.D. 506

An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Research and Development and Commercialization

April 9, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

We, Dr. Jessica Chertow and Susan Ahern, are writing to express our strong support for L.D. 506, which aims to fund research, development, and commercialization within Maine. As Vice President of Research and Vice President of Innovation at MaineHealth, we believe this legislation is pivotal to boost innovation and enhance economic growth within the state.

Dr. Jessica Chertow: As an infectious disease investigator with extensive experience at federal government organizations such as the CDC, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of investment in research and development. Throughout my tenure at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where I served as the Deputy Scientific Director at NHLBI and more recently as the Associate Director of Scientific Resources, I have seen how strategic investments in research fuel both scientific advancement and economic growth. It is with this perspective that I am pleased to lend my strong support for L.D. 506, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Research and Development and Commercialization.

This bond, which supports innovation and commercialization, represents an invaluable opportunity for Maine to continue building upon its growing life sciences ecosystem, with MaineHealth at the forefront of these efforts improving the health and quality of life of Maine's residents. For over 30 years, MaineHealth Institute for Research (MHIR) has served as a cornerstone of Maine's biomedical research community, driving cutting-edge research across a wide array of disciplines. Currently at MHIR, over 25 researchers and 42 clinician-researchers are investigating cancer, cardiovascular disease, psychiatric disorders, diabetes, and infectious diseases. In addition to our pioneering research, MHIR runs vibrant clinical trials, offering the latest medical care options and groundbreaking therapies to the Maine community.

Moreover, MHIR has become a key partner in research training and career development, collaborating with local academic institutions to foster the next generation of biomedical innovators. We are uniquely positioned to accelerate Maine's life sciences sector through strategic partnerships with industry leaders, leveraging our advanced core facilities, equipment, and large clinical data sets. Proximity to these resources is critical for attracting and retaining companies that will drive both scientific discoveries and economic growth in Maine.

Susan Ahern: As Vice President of Innovation at MaineHealth, Adjunct Associate Professor with Tufts University School of Medicine, board member of the Maine Center for Entrepreneurs and Maine Venture Fund, and co-founder of four healthcare startups, I understand the value of empowering innovative entrepreneurs of Maine-based businesses to accelerate and am pleased to support L.D. 560.

In 2020, MaineHealth Innovation was established to provide resources to our 23,000 care team members, empowering them to pursue ideas that address unmet care needs. Since MaineHealth Innovation's inception, seven companies have been started addressing healthcare gaps with novel solutions to make our communities the healthiest in America. In collaboration with a colleague from the University of New England, Dr. Sue Miesfeldt, a clinical oncologist, co-founded Satya, a company manufacturing a novel diagnostic tool to improve early breast cancer detection. Their pioneering diagnostic kit has potential to improve early cancer detection and treatment globally. Another startup, CryptoMedix is developing an innovative new platform for the treatment of multiple tumor types that dramatically expands the pool of treatable patients. Finally, a neurosurgeon founded Soft Robotic Angiography and is creating a smart robotic clot retriever, which will revolutionize how surgeons clear blood clots.

L.D. 506 is essential for fostering the next wave of innovation in Maine. This bond will support the creation of high-paying jobs, attract new business partners, and catalyze the growth of Maine's research landscape. The investment in our state's research infrastructure is an investment in our collective future — one that will pay dividends in both economic prosperity and improved health outcomes for Maine's residents.

We urge you to support L.D. 506 to ensure Maine's long-term economic and health prosperity. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jessica H. Chertow, Vice President of Research, MaineHealth, MaineHealth Institute for Research (MHIR)

Susan Ahern, Vice President of Innovation, MaineHealth