

**Testimony of Jennifer Riggs, MaineGeneral Health Chief Nursing Officer and
University of Maine at Augusta Board of Visitors Chair In Support of LD 1014, *An
Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Develop Maine Talent and
Innovation by Improving the Infrastructure of the University of Maine System*,
April 17, 2025**

Good afternoon, Sen. Rotundo, Rep. Gattine and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations & Financial Affairs. My name is Jennifer Riggs and I serve as the Chief Nursing Officer for MaineGeneral Health and the CEO of Community Care. I am also honored to serve as the Chair of the Advisory Board of Visitors for the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA). With both those hats on, I am here today to testify in strong support of LD 1014, *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Develop Maine Talent and Innovation by Improving the Infrastructure of the University of Maine System*.

Maine's public universities are the state's leading provider of nurses, which MaineGeneral and other organizations across the state depend on to provide high-quality care to our patients, family and friends, and neighbors.

In 2018, the Legislature and Maine voters approved a bond for the University of Maine System that included funding to enhance and expand nursing education facilities, including for hands-on simulation. At the time, Maine was facing a critical nursing shortage but the universities' nursing programs were turning away hundreds of qualified applicants each year because they lacked the space to train them.

As a result of investments made through that bond, including at the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine at Presque Isle, the System's output of nurses is increasing, as is the size and skill of the state's nursing workforce. Last academic year, Maine's public universities conferred more than 500 in-demand nursing degrees, including 70 through UMA.

Despite this, a new report from the Maine Nursing Action Coalition concluded the state's need for nurses is actually growing, given our aging population, and the projected shortfall is now 2,800 nurses by 2030.

In response, Maine's public universities continue to expand access to nursing education, largely using federal funding secured by U.S. Senators Susan Collins and Angus King. This includes the development of the former Purdue University Global site in the Augusta Marketplace into the UMA Capital Center, which will open this year and allow UMA to grow its nursing enrollment by another 20%.

MaineGeneral relies on over 1,600 skilled, compassionate nurses across the health system, which is one-third of our entire workforce. We committed \$480,000 to this Capital Center project because our patients in the Kennebec Valley benefit directly from the high-quality training of graduates from UMA's nursing program.

The need for training future nurses is absolutely critical and requires us to have strong community partnerships. Like other universities in the System, our organization has seen that UMA is on the forefront of addressing the needs of our community, especially those related to workforce development. They partner not only with MaineGeneral, but with many other essential employers across the region to build and expand programs that provide students with the critical skills our community needs, now and into the future.

But the availability of federal funds that UMA and other UMS universities have relied on in recent years to complete capital projects is uncertain and the System's need is significant – an estimated \$1.8 billion. It is time for the State to increase investment for infrastructure improvements at its public universities, as this bond would do. Doing so will spur private giving and ensure essential Maine employers like MaineGeneral will have access to the well-prepared workforce we rely on to care for our communities.

I urge you to support LD 1014 and continued investments in the operations and infrastructure of the University of Maine System. Thank you and I welcome your questions.