

Testimony of Madeleine Nowak In Support of LD 1533, “An Act to Ensure the Retention of R1 Research Institution Status by the University of Maine”

Hello Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

Thank you for allowing me to speak this afternoon on the need to support LD 1533 and secure the University of Maine’s R1 status with funding to support graduate student appointments. My name is Madeleine Nowak, and I’m a 5th year PhD candidate in the Graduate School of Biomedical Science and Engineering at the University of Maine. Although I am originally from Illinois, in the past five years, Maine has won my heart and become my home. I am thankful every day I was brought to Maine for my graduate degree, and I’m proud to contribute to University of Maine’s R1 status as a graduate student and researcher.

Others have shared and will share with you the criteria for achieving and maintaining R1 status as a research University, and particularly at how we are risk of losing that status. I want to tell you about why that status is crucial to supporting Maine’s economy and growing the young adult population in the nation’s oldest state.

An R1 status that indicates the University of Maine conducts the highest tier of research activity helps us to recruit high-quality faculty and students dedicated to researching topics which are often deeply entwined with Maine’s needs and values as a state. For example, our students and faculty tackle problems around climate change and sustainable fishing and forestry, and I’m personally part of a group working to identify new treatments for obesity and its comorbidities, which is crucial to the lives and wellbeing of a third of adult Mainers. Others further work on how to improve health outcomes when so much of our population lives in rural areas and doesn’t have easy access to physicians.

When we’re able to recruit high-quality faculty members and students dedicated to solving these problems, we also have the opportunity to build up the infrastructure in this state to support more jobs around these researchers—think administrators, yes, but also facility managers, technicians, maintenance personnel and engineers to take care of buildings and equipment—and further increase our ability to do that research which is so important to everyone in our state. The impact of our research ripples out not just in our professional fields, but has a broader, positive effect on our local communities, our state, our country, and even the entire world.

University of Maine’s status as an R1 research university CAN spark a positive-feedback mechanism to magnify this impact. With this prestigious designation, we can recruit talented faculty and students who are better equipped to secure federal and private funding. This allows us to then build up more sophisticated infrastructure around

them, which allows us to create jobs, which builds up the economy. And when we find innovative solutions to the problems Mainers face, we retain more of our population AND attract more talented faculty and students excited about working and researching in this environment... so the cycle continues.

But just because that's how the R1 status CAN support the state of Maine and the University, doesn't mean that these outcomes are guaranteed. You see, to recruit those faculty, we need to be able to support high-quality students to work under them. And to recruit high quality students, we need to be able to *pay* them. University of Maine currently faces a funding crisis and the budgets of many departments and programs which fund master's and PhD students at University of Maine are under threat. Without these student workers, the University's R1 status will be lost, and so too will the positive effects that come with it. State support for graduate workers in the University of Maine system and the research we conduct with LD 1533, however, will further fuel that progress, and continue to benefit the entire state.

I mentioned at the beginning that I'm a transplant to Maine, and while I love this state with my whole heart and soul, right now there simply aren't the opportunities I need to continue my career here, not with a skyrocketing cost of living and minimal research infrastructure for my field. But if the R1 status at the University of Maine is supported, the state and the University can not only attract and recruit more students like me but also take steps to retain us and help create the opportunities people like me need to come back and continue our careers here. I urge you to support LD 1533 to help fund graduate workers in the University of Maine system and maintain our R1 status.

Thank you.