![Maine's Public Universities — University of Maine System logo](logo)

DATE: May 12, 2025
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services
FROM: Sam Warren, UMS Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer
RE: **UMS Opposition to LD 1794,** *An Act to Provide Protection from Unfair Parking Tickets on Lots Accessible to the Public*

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services: I apologize that commitments in other committees prevented me from testifying in person against LD 1794, *An Act to Provide Protection from Unfair Parking Tickets on Lots Accessible to the Public.*

The University of Maine System strongly opposes LD 1794, which would limit our ability to maintain campus safety and accessibility for students, employees, and visitors and generate the revenue necessary to improve critical public infrastructure. We would note that in March, your colleagues on the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee **voted <u>unanimously</u> to uphold our public universities' authority and current practices for ticketing visitors for parking violations** by rejecting LD 198.

Maine's public universities are burdened by $1.8 billion in deferred maintenance due to decades of underfunding by the State and our commitment to student affordability. More than half of our buildings and three-quarters of our residence halls have not been meaningfully renovated in at least 50 years, and deteriorating campus roadways and parking areas also desperately need investment. For example, the University of Southern Maine (USM) has more than $11 million in parking-related deferred maintenance and the University of Maine needs at least $4.3 million just for pavement repairs and an additional $1 million for parking lot lighting.

Some UMS universities charge for parking to generate revenue to partially offset the costs of operating and maintaining parking infrastructure, including garage construction, ADA compliance, resurfacing and sealing, plowing, safety lighting, and emergency call box installation. Our universities also issue citations when parking violations occur, typically starting with warnings and then escalating to tickets with small fines. This practice is consistent with how other public and private entities in Maine enforce parking and public safety best practices.

Citations and the revenue they generate are essential to ensuring effective parking operations and management. **Parking enforcement ensures individuals purchase the appropriate parking permits, helps maintain traffic flow and turnover so spaces are available for those who need them to access university programs and services, and promotes public safety by preventing obstructive parking**. This is especially important at our larger universities, where demand for parking greatly exceeds available spaces.

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To improve parking management, meet increased demand, and reduce congestion in local neighborhoods from university user overflow, USM constructed an additional 638-space garage on its growing Portland campus and deployed digital parking and enforcement systems in Portland and Gorham in 2023. While the system utilizes license plate recognition technology, USM's third-party vendor relies on a human verification process to guarantee accuracy and comply with current Maine law. In the first year, the new system handled an average of 10,000 parking transactions per day and less than 4% resulted in a citation. However, in an effort to further improve the user experience and access to parking, USM made a number of improvements that went into effect in Fall 2024 and were directly informed by campus and community feedback. These included improved signage; extended grace periods; a warning before ticketing; expanded payment options, including with kiosks, through texting, and at lot exits; and contracting with a new payment and enforcement vendor (ParkEngage). The result has been a more seamless parking experience and fewer citations and complaints. While USM's parking services still do not break even, losses have been reduced from $1.6 million in FY23 to $1.1 million in FY24 — the first year technology was used for payment and enforcement.

LD 1794 would undermine that progress and prevent USM and other public and private entities from leveraging well-established technology to support efficient, effective parking and enforcement. The amendment proposes that fines "may not exceed an amount that is two times what that person was required to pay to park at the property." It is unclear how the required payment amount would be calculated, given the range of rates (hours, day pass, snow ban flat rate, monthly or yearly permits, etc.) or if a vehicle was ticketed for parking in an unauthorized space for which there are was no applicable rate (e.g. taking up multiple spaces, blocking a fire hydrant, obstructing traffic, etc.) Regardless, it is likely this provision would significantly limit parking enforcement penalties and thus, the likelihood that individuals would appropriately pay to park and comply with relevant policies, including those necessary to preserve spaces/lanes for individuals with disabilities and fire or other emergency vehicles.

USM and Maine's public universities share the sponsor's stated goal of protecting consumers and we continue to work with stakeholders to improve parking and other services necessary to our operations, including through the use of technology. LD 1794 goes too far though, compromising public safety and the System's fiduciary duty while removing the responsibility of consumers to pay for goods and services they receive and face reasonable consequences when they do not do so. Additionally, it would put our System in breach of a five-year contract with ParkEngage and require an additional appropriation by the Legislature of at least $500,000 annually to offset the expected loss of revenue just at USM. We urge you to follow the lead of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee and reject this overreach, however well-intended it may be.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please let me know if there is additional information the University of Maine System can provide.