



**Testimony from the University of Maine System presented by
UMS Director of Government & Community Relations Samantha Warren
LD 129, Resolve, to Direct the University of Maine System to Study the Feasibility of
Establishing a Public Allopathic Medical School in Penobscot County - Feb. 2, 2023**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Samantha Warren and I am the Director of Government Relations for the University of Maine System (UMS), the premier producer of the state's skilled workforce and the home of its only R1 research university – the University of Maine.

Over the last decade, UMaine has conducted **cutting-edge research to understand and improve human health and well-being and our public universities have collectively conferred 55,970 degrees – led by those in health professions**, including nursing, mental health and human services, health sciences and public health. Most of our campuses are rooted in rural Maine, where many of our students come from and where they stay or go to live, work and contribute to our communities after they graduate.

We are aware – from both our experiences and from our research – of the severe shortages of healthcare professions in rural Maine, including physicians, and the implications for public and economic health. We are actively working to help Maine address these needs through our education, research and service. For example, utilizing both federal and Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan funds, we are making bold investments in nursing simulation facilities and faculty, including at our universities in Fort Kent and Presque Isle to expand UMS nursing enrollment, and have recently launched innovative initiatives led by UMaine to prepare and place more behavioral health professionals, including psychologists, social workers and substance abuse clinicians, especially in northern and eastern Maine and tribal communities. Meanwhile, we recently held an internal Systemwide competition to address the grand challenge of rural health and well-being, with the winning interdisciplinary and intercampus research teams and their external collaborators focused on issues like expanding telehealth training and use to support developmental and emotional needs of children in rural Maine schools, and rural injury and violence prevention.

Given our tremendous statewide impact, UMS appreciates that healthcare and political leaders are looking to our System as a possible solution to the shortage of physicians in much of Maine. The good idea that there should be a public medical school affiliated with one of Maine's public universities is actually older than our System itself, and was most recently considered by the 120th Legislature.

A comprehensive legislative study undertaken in 1966 into the feasibility of establishing a medical school in Maine offers critical considerations that remain relevant (including the importance of investing in health research). This Committee should also know that **in 1975, the Legislature granted UMS authority to operate a college of medicine and confer the degree of “Doctor of Medicine,” assuming appropriate accreditation, though made clear the System had no duty to do so until it had received or been assured of sufficient construction and ongoing operational funds.**

In the decades since, Maine's rural physician shortage has only deepened, as have our health-related research, education and partnerships, especially at UMaine, which in 2018 launched an Institute of Medicine to coordinate and catalyze health and life sciences scholarship and service, including better bridging to healthcare partners like Northern Light Health and research institutes like the Jackson Laboratory and Maine Medical Center Research Institute.

You are well aware of our System's serious enrollment challenges and infrastructure condition, and also our strategic initiatives to strengthen and grow our public universities and Maine's workforce, including exciting efforts to boost our output not just of high-quality healthcare professionals but also of engineers and computing scientists, educators, entrepreneurs, attorneys, actuaries and more. Policy and investment to sustain our campuses where they are currently located and support and strengthen our existing and emerging programs remain our priority.

However, if the Legislature and stakeholders are serious about Maine having a public medical school that provides an affordable, high-quality path to an MD and a meaningful career caring for rural and underserved populations, **funding a feasibility study to be led by UMS is the first step and we would welcome undertaking this work if adequate new appropriations and time were provided.** Our System would propose partnering with Northern Light Health for the study, and together, we have developed a draft structure and process that we believe is inclusive and answers key questions, and that I have attached to my testimony.

As you will see, we suggest engaging stakeholders, including the University of New England; Maine Medical Center – a partner with Tufts University in the Maine Track Program; associations representing Maine hospitals, physicians and primary care providers; Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness; and relevant State and federal stakeholders, including the Maine Department of Health and Human Services and the VA Maine Healthcare System. We would expect to examine and make recommendations regarding a number of relevant areas, including: current and future physician workforce supply and distribution data; innovative allopathic medical school models, especially those that include partnerships between public universities and nonprofit healthcare systems; enrollment projections; construction and operating funding models that include additional State appropriations and tuition revenue; impact to existing medical education and training programs in the state; and other opportunities to strengthen health and medical education, and research activities to enhance the health and well-being of the citizens of Maine. A credible study could not be carried out within existing resources.

UMS thanks Sen. Baldacci and those supporting LD 129 for recognizing the important role our public universities, and especially UMaine, have in meeting Maine's medical workforce development and research needs. We look forward to partnering with them and the Committee to develop this concept and, if funded, deliver to the next Legislature an actionable analysis about the feasibility of establishing a public college of medicine within UMS and for Maine.

Resolve, To Direct the University of Maine System to Study the Feasibility of Establishing A Public Allopathic Medical School in Penobscot County

Sec. 1. Allopathic medical school feasibility study. Resolved: That the University of Maine System shall study and analyze the feasibility of establishing a public allopathic medical school in Penobscot County. In conducting the study, the University of Maine System shall examine and make recommendations regarding:

1. State and national current and future physician workforce supply and distribution data including in primary and specialty care fields
2. Innovative allopathic medical school models especially those that include partnerships between public universities and nonprofit health care systems
3. School enrollment projections
4. Program content and accreditation standards
5. Required resources including personnel, classrooms, research and clinical laboratories and equipment, student housing, and operating expenses
6. Capacity in the state to support residency training
7. The costs to establish and operate a public allopathic medical school, and funding models that include State appropriations and tuition revenue
8. University of Maine System Board of Trustee policies for creating new programs
9. Impact of establishing an allopathic medical school to existing education and health-related training programs in the state
10. Programs to retain graduates to pursue careers in Maine, especially in rural primary and specialty care with a focus on underserved areas and populations
11. Other programs and partnerships to address physician workforce current and projected needs
12. Opportunities to strengthen health and medical research activities to enhance the health and wellbeing of the citizens of Maine

In performing its duties under this section, the University of Maine System must coordinate with a tertiary hospital medical education program located in Penobscot County and additionally solicit the testimony, advice or participation of representatives of the following organizations:

1. The Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information
2. The Maine Department of Health and Human Services
3. The State Board of Education
4. The VA Maine Healthcare System
5. Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness
6. A statewide association representing Maine hospitals
7. A statewide association representing Maine physicians
8. A statewide association representing Maine primary care providers
9. A medical center in the state with an education and training partnership with a medical school located out of the state
10. A nonprofit community health care network that includes federally qualified health centers

11. An osteopathic medical school based in the state

The University of Maine System is not required under this resolve to undertake work for which it does not have or has not received sufficient resources.

Sec. 2. Report. Resolved: That, by December 1, 2024, the University of Maine System shall submit a report, including recommended legislation and appropriations requests, based on its study and analysis in section 1 to the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs. The committee is authorized to submit legislation related to the report to the First Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature.

Sec. 3. Appropriations and allocations.

**UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM, BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE
Education and General Activities – UMS 0031**

Initiative: Provides funding for the study of the feasibility of establishing a public allopathic medical school in Penobscot County to serve the state of Maine.

GENERAL FUND	2023-24	2024-25
All Other	\$0	\$300,000
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<hr/>	<hr/>
	\$0	\$300,000

SUMMARY

This bill requires the University of Maine System to study the feasibility of establishing a public allopathic medical school in Penobscot County. It also provides appropriations to fund the study, which must be done in partnership with a tertiary hospital medical education program located in Penobscot County and be informed by input from relevant health care and related organizations. It makes clear UMS is not required to undertake the study if adequate appropriations are not provided.