



Testimony Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations & Financial Affairs and Labor & Housing  
February 10, 2023

Senators Rotundo and Tipping, Representatives Sachs and Roeder, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations & Financial Affairs and Labor & Housing,

Good afternoon. My name is Janet Smith, and I am the Executive Director of New Ventures Maine. I live in the town of Industry and I'm here today to speak in support of New Ventures Maine's (or NVME) General Fund allocation within the University of Maine System's (UMS) biennial budget request for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

As some of you may know, NVME was created through state legislation in 1977 as a pilot program, based at the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA), to serve Displaced Homemakers. Our name was later changed to Maine Centers for Women, Work, and Community and, in 2015, to New Ventures Maine to reflect the expanded scope and reach of our services. Over our 44-year history, our mission has remained constant: to help Maine people succeed in the changing economy and achieve economic security for themselves and their families.

Right now, the current needs in our communities are wide-ranging. The high cost of food and utilities, scarcity of affordable housing, and continued shortages of childcare options compound those needs. And New Ventures Maine's mission is more relevant than ever.

But our reach is constrained by staff capacity and under-competitive salary for new hires. We are asking for 6% in additional funding through this budget to enable NVME to attract and retain well-qualified staff to enable NVME to reach more Maine people, both in person and via online interactive classes.

In FY22, NVME helped nearly 400 new and aspiring small business owners; assisted over 300 unemployed and low-wage workers adjust to the changing job market; and helped nearly 300 economically vulnerable individuals and families manage their financial situations. We also introduced over 900 students to career options in the trades. In our work with CA\$H Maine, we served over 4,000 Maine tax filers, generating millions in federal and state income tax refunds, and helped nearly 7,000 households receive Inflation Relief Payments as well as state tax credits for which many did not know they were eligible. All these programs and services were open to the public and offered free of charge.

As our state continues to deal with the impact of inflation and racial, gender, and economic inequities, and move forward with economic recovery and development, NVME is a valuable resource to adults in work/life transition, for individuals seeking financial stability, to would-be entrepreneurs wanting to contribute to their own and their community's economic development, to employers looking for well-trained and qualified employees, and to policymakers looking for creative solutions for building a strong Maine economy.

During the pandemic, NVME moved all our classes and one-to-one advising online to safely provide services. In doing so we were able to reach a new cohort of people who would not have been able to attend an in-person class due to travel and childcare responsibilities. We are aware that by providing online services we miss many under-resourced individuals who are not able to access the internet or for whom in-person contact is more useful. As we move beyond the pandemic, we will need the staffing to continue with a strong offering of online services and in-person services.

As a statewide outreach and education program of UMA and the UMS and co-located on many of the campuses and centers of the System, NVME is uniquely positioned to:

- help more adults start or return to college, complete degrees, and workforce credentials, and successfully transition to the workplace.
- assist additional would-be entrepreneurs to develop a solid business plan, access financing and other resources, and sustain and grow their businesses.
- host in-person and virtual career sessions for more students grades 8 - 12 to raise their awareness of career options in the trades, focusing on underrepresented populations.
- and help more individuals and families develop skills to manage their money, reduce debt, improve their credit, and build savings for emergency needs and future goals.

In addition, through our leadership of the nine coalitions of CA\$H Maine, we are uniquely positioned to increase the number of households to whom we provide free tax preparation and educate about programs in their community that can help them meet their financial needs. This is a small investment for a big return. CA\$H Maine helps people access tax refunds that they will then use in their communities to buy the things that they need. In 2022 CA\$H Maine generated over \$5 million in federal income tax refunds and nearly \$2 million in Property Tax Fairness and Sales Tax Fairness Credits. A large portion of the funding for CA\$H Maine goes to organizations that provide the services locally in our Maine communities. Without critical state funding to provide the infrastructure for this program, this would not be possible.

The state allocation provides a vital 61% of NVME's annual operating budget. The remainder is generated through a combination of foundation grants, federal contracts, individual and business contributions, and fee-for-service activities.

We very much appreciate the State of Maine's investment in New Ventures Maine's services. We are proud to be an important part of our state's workforce, entrepreneurship, and financial systems and we are prepared to assist with implementation of Maine's economic recovery and economic development strategies.

Please refer to our annual report for more information and visit our website at [newventuresmaine.org](https://newventuresmaine.org) to view our schedule of classes, graduate success stories, and past annual reports. We are happy to be a resource at any time to you and your constituents.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions now or at the Work Session.