

**Testimony of Brianna Demaso of Brewer, University of Southern Maine Student Body President
In Support of Funding for the University of Maine System as Proposed in LD 258
February 13, 2023**

Senators Rotundo and Rafferty, Representatives Sachs and Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Brianna Demaso and I am the Student Body President at the University of Southern Maine.

I am a senior double majoring in Business Management and Marketing with a minor in Theatre. I am standing before you today to testify in favor of the University of Maine System funding increases proposed in the Governor's budget (LD 258).

When I first came to USM in 2019, I intended to graduate with a degree in Business Management and return to my hometown of Brewer to run my family's water treatment business. The fantastic seminars I had taken in my first semester convinced me to add a second major and a minor, and challenged my initial career choice.

I credit the COVID-19 pandemic with my triumphs as well as the opportunities USM has given me. In March 2020, when I went back to my parents' house for remote learning, I realized that I had not been taking full advantage of my college experience. I submitted an application to be an orientation leader, and a series of subsequent opportunities has resulted in me now being President of the Student Body, representing and leading nearly 6,300 of my incredible peers, many who are the first in their families to come to college.

Today, I'd like to focus on some of the essential resources that our public institutions provide to students like me to help them prepare for success in college and our Maine careers. The chance to enroll in a college in my home state with a well-respected business school with the same prestigious accreditation as Harvard, has three completely different campuses in Gorham, Lewiston and Portland, and highly affordable tuition is remarkable. 42% of students who come to USM are first-generation college students and nearly half of all undergraduates qualify for federal Pell grants because of their exceptional financial need. Many students are also new Mainers. All are welcomed here, and supported to be successful in their education.

As part of our high-quality education and workforce preparation, and because of state investment, USM and other schools in the University of Maine System provide incredible opportunities such as hands-on research, extracurricular activities, internships, and other work experiences with local employers that often lead to job offers.

At USM, I've been fortunate to have two very meaningful research opportunities. The first examined restaurant employee retention during COVID-19, while the second explored how women in STEM

laboratory classrooms can unintentionally be excluded. The College of Science, Technology, and Health at USM now has access to the research my colleague and I provided, and they are using our findings to change how laboratory classes are taught at USM and promote educational equity.

The extensive experience I have acquired at USM has equipped me to begin a career in marketing, entrepreneurship, and event organizing. In order to advance Maine's economic growth and prosperity, it is now my intention to work in Maine for a chamber of commerce.

Your investment in the University of Maine System is an investment in my future and in Maine's future. These extraordinary public institutions offer accessibility, education, empathy, opportunity and strengthen the economy and our communities in ways that Maine depends on. Your increased funding will not only keep more Maine students here, but signal to students and families in other states that this is a place worth coming to for college, and to stay to live and work for a lifetime. Our public institutions are Maine's future.

Thank you for your time and support. I look forward to questions or comments you may have.