

**Testimony of Behalf of the University of Maine System  
Presented by Samantha Warren, Director of Government Relations  
Regarding LD 1511, *An Act to Update the Laws Governing the University of Maine  
System's Board of Agriculture and to Rename the Maine Agricultural Experiment Station*  
April 19, 2023**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry: My name is Samantha Warren and I am the Director of Government Relations for the University of Maine System (UMS).

**From its very founding in 1862 as a land-grant called the Maine State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts, our System's now-R1 University of Maine has been committed to serving the diverse needs of the state's agricultural stakeholders through world-class education, research and service.**

In 1998, the Legislature created the Board of Agriculture (BOA) in reaction to concerns raised by some in Maine's agriculture community to the university's plan to potentially close one of its research farms. These research farms are part of what is known as the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station, housed within UMaine's College of Natural Science, Forestry and Agriculture, and directly support research that enhances the profitability and sustainability of Maine's natural resource-based industries, protects Maine's environment, and improves the health of its citizens.

Highmoor Farm in Monmouth remains in operation but the fiscal challenges that threatened its sustainability back then are even greater today, in part because UMS has held in-state tuition flat for eight of the past 12 years to ensure college access and affordability for Maine families, and State appropriation has simply not kept pace with our rising operating costs. **When adjusted for inflation, the Legislature's investment this year in Maine's public universities is nearly one-fifth less than it was in 1998.**

The BOA was intended to advise and advocate for UMS — and especially UMaine — as it relates to agriculture research and programming, yet the statute is far from straightforward. For example, it states the BOA's duties are limited to advising the UMS Chancellor and UMaine President and then goes on to detail other duties including those relating to budget. This is inconsistent with the purview of other advisory boards and in direct conflict with long-standing State law, which vests authority in UMS Trustees, who are nominated by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature, as the sole governing and planning body of the university with the responsibility for preparing and approving the operating and capital budgets of the university.

Recognizing this, in recent months the BOA has established a number of subcommittees including those pertaining to its structure and charge to consider its appropriate role as a modern advisory board and propose amendments to the 25-year-old State statute accordingly.

The BOA's time and tremendous insight is greatly valued by UMaine and our System, and we appreciate the thoughtfulness that has gone into their discussions, which have led to LD 1511.

We agree with some of the suggested changes to the law, including the removal of impractical language that suggests the advisory board and the director of the experiment station must reach agreement "on all issues."

However, we are concerned that as drafted, **the bill before you does not go far enough to provide needed clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the BOA, and requires additional activities of the BOA that would likely fall on already-stretched university employees and budgets.** Specifically, LD 1511 would add requirements that the BOA conduct public listening sessions at least once per year, expand annual reporting to the Legislature to overview emerging trends in agriculture, and develop detailed long-range plans every five years for the university's experiment station and extension. It is important you know UMaine currently receives no appropriation to support the BOA, which has more than doubled the number of in-person meetings it holds each year with scheduling, planning, staffing, reporting, venue and food costs largely borne by our public university. **Given the BOA's increasing concerns about inadequate public investment in the university and related capacity challenges, we know they — and you — would not want to further strain our limited human and fiscal resources.**

For these reasons, UMS cannot support LD 1511 and welcomes continued conversation to clarify and make current the charge of the BOA.

On behalf of UMS Chancellor Malloy and UMaine President/UMS Vice-Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy, I want to **thank the members of the BOA, including Senator Ingwersen and Representative Pluecker, for their service and recognition of the vital role Maine's land-grant university has in strengthening and growing Maine agriculture.** We feel fortunate that both industry leaders and policymakers are so willing to invest their time and talents to advise our activities, and champion additional appropriations to support the university faculty and facilities necessary for us to produce the workforce, innovation and understanding Maine agriculture needs to succeed amid changing markets and climates.

We look forward to reaching consensus on LD 1511 and to continuing to partner with the BOA and this esteemed Committee to advance agriculture and the jobs and opportunity it sustains statewide. Thank you and I welcome your questions.