



Teresa S. Pierce
Senator, District 25

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

6 Waites Landing Road
Falmouth, ME 04105

Testimony of Senator Teresa S. Pierce introducing
**LD 460, An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Improve
Student Success and Workforce Readiness Within the University of Maine
System**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
April 26, 2023*

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Teresa Pierce, and I represent Senate District 25, which includes Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, Yarmouth (majority), Gray, and Long Island. Today, I am here to present LD 460, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Improve Student Success and Workforce Readiness Within the University of Maine System"

The University of Maine System (UMS) is the largest public education system in our state, and in the last decade, has conferred nearly 60,000 degrees. They have produced many of the nurses, educators, engineers, and business and community leaders working in our state today, as well as exciting research and innovations that have helped to sustain our heritage industries and strengthen our public, environmental and economic health.

Having served on the Legislature's Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I have had an opportunity to see first hand the outstanding work being done by the UMS. I've been impressed with their efforts to increasingly promote college access and affordability, and to be responsive to the needs of Maine. At the same time, I've shared the System's growing concern about the condition of its campuses. Having gone on many college tours, first with my daughter and more recently with my son, I know how much facilities matter to selecting a school where a postsecondary student will live and study for four or more years of their life. The campuses do not need to be Taj Mahals, but modern infrastructure sends a message about the quality, value and experience a student can expect in return for one of their family's biggest and most important investments.

The 130th Legislature provided some important funding for the University, but we have not invested in the much needed infrastructure. The cost of that is a further deterioration of a facility that was already outdated and in some cases, unsafe. I remember in 2015, when the University of Maine at Machias had to unexpectedly move faculty and students out of one of its buildings in the middle of February, after it was determined to be structurally unsafe and in danger of collapse. Soon after, the building had to be torn down. That was a wake-up call for the university, and the Legislature. Since then, the System has focused on developing a data-driven



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plan to right-size and improve its infrastructure. Their leadership in informed capital planning has led the Maine Community College System, Maine Maritime Academy and even the State of Maine (DAFS) to recently join them in working with the same independent expert to annually evaluate needs, track progress, and plan strategic investments and space management. The recent findings of that collective analysis stated this: “Without a significant infusion of capital, Maine public higher education infrastructure faces increased risk of system failure.”

Today, of the \$1.6 billion of infrastructure investment needed among Maine’s public postsecondary institutions, \$1.3 billion of that is within the University of Maine System. I like to think we can pay now, or we can pay more later – both in the costs of lost opportunity for Maine students and our economy, and in increasing costs to renovate and rebuild campus facilities as they fall into disrepair.

I was proud to join with some of you who currently serve on this Committee to support the bonds that brought needed funding to the UMS, Maine Community College System and Maine Maritime Academy back in 2018. That was a good start. But the remaining need is so great, and so is the opportunity before us.

LD 460 would send to voters a \$100 million general obligation bond. The bond provides funds, to be matched by private and other funds, to strategically improve infrastructure at all campuses of the University of Maine System. These are necessary investments to sustain and increase program enrollment, improve student success, meet the needs of Maine employers for more skilled workers and research-driven innovation and benefit the surrounding communities. Projects must be aligned with the universities' respective capital plans and consistent with the policies of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System and may include renovation, replacement, removal and repurposing of classrooms, research laboratories, residence halls and other infrastructure.

In Maine’s Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029, the Mills Administration has set the goal of 75,000 additional people in the workforce. “... The workforce of tomorrow will require continuous upgrading of knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet ever-changing market needs. And to support that culture of continuous learning, Maine will also need an education system that is accessible, affordable, and effective.”

The report underscores that a substantial investment in the University of Maine System would be a significant countermeasure and have a tremendous impact on our ability to meet this unquestionable need for our state. “Maine has strong, talented, hard-working people. We don’t have enough of them. This strategy forecasts a 65,000 person contraction in the workforce over the next ten years unless robust countermeasures are undertaken.”



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The report goes on to say that “talent is the new currency. Maine is in competition with other states and the world to build and retain a creative and productive workforce, to attract knowledge industries, and to have a well-educated public that can make wise civic and policy decisions.”

Our investment and continued support in our public university system will have a profound, immediate and lasting impact on these goals.

Thank you for your consideration. I know others are here today to speak to this bill, but I would be happy to answer any questions.