

Testimony In Support of LD 460, *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Improve Student Success and Workforce Readiness Within the University of Maine System*
From Cathryn Wimett, Chair of the University of Maine at Farmington Board of Visitors
April 26, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Committee on Appropriations & Financial Affairs: I am Cathryn Wimett from Industry, Maine. I was a teacher for 46 years, capping my career with 19 years as a faculty member in the Division of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at the University of Maine at Farmington, where I now chair the Board of Visitors. On behalf of that Board, I am testifying today in support of LD 460, the \$100 million infrastructure bond for the University of Maine System, as well as the 4.5% appropriations increase for the System likely to be in the Part II budget.

At the University of Maine at Farmington, the oldest campus in the system, nearly two-thirds of the buildings have not been updated in at least 50 years. Attractive, functional buildings make a good first impression on the community and, most importantly, on potential students. Our buildings provide space for living and learning as well as space for a wide variety of community functions. UMF is the hub of the Farmington community. The strength and vibrancy of the town and all of Franklin County is tied to the health and success of its university.

With steadily changing demographics and recent decreases in college attendance in our state, all campuses of the University of Maine System are experiencing a drop in the number of enrolled students. All campuses are engaged in a variety of efforts to attract more students of all ages and interests to Maine's public universities. How can we do this?

What will make an impact? First and foremost, **facilities** make an impact. Clean, attractive buildings with good lighting, hot and cold running water, and sufficient space and equipment for multiple campus and community purposes matter. UMF facilities need to be repaired and modernized now and on a continuing basis. We know that we have lost potential students specifically because other institutions have more modern, attractive, and functional facilities.

In the past, the Maine Legislature addressed the ongoing need for improving system facilities. The 2018 State bond leveraged federal investment to expand the Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center, which, when it opens this summer, will allow UMF to grow enrollment in Early Childhood Education degree programs and provide community families with 20 new infant/toddler childcare slots. This will be the first time Sweatt-Winter has the capacity to provide childcare for infants, a greatly needed service in our area. Education programs at UMF can help alleviate Maine's crushing need for more teachers and support staff, but renovated facilities are essential if we are to attract more students. LD 460 could help UMF make the additional impact in preparing teachers that the new Sweatt-Winter center will make in the Farmington area.

Thank you for the support you have already given to the University of Maine System campuses and for allowing me to testify in support of LD 460 and the Part II budget.