



The Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Testimony from Jason Judd, Ed.D., Executive Director, Educate Maine

In Support Of

L.D. # 460: “An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Improve Student Success and Workforce Readiness Within the University of Maine System”

April 26, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of L.D. #460.

Educate Maine’s mission is to champion college and career readiness through increasing educational attainment. We are a founding member of the MaineSpark coalition working diligently to increase adult educational attainment to 60% by 2025 to meet the demand of Maine employers. In order to reach this goal and make sure we have workers with the skills required by Maine employers, we need to invest in the University of Maine System (UMS). This system develops and supports our future engineers, teachers, nurses, software developers, and so many others to join our Maine workforce. The need to expand our workforce is the number one priority for Maine employers, and UMS is poised to do that if we invest in these campuses across Maine.

My understanding is that UMS currently has \$1.6 billion in deferred maintenance and infrastructure needs across the state. The majority of facilities and residence halls have not been renovated in more than 50 years. We know an investment in infrastructure and deferred maintenance will attract and retain more students at these Maine institutions. As a result, UMS will be able to support more students joining the Maine workforce and make sure they have the skills necessary to thrive at Maine employers. This investment will help UMS make sure students are able to have the best education possible and improve the basic health standards and ADA requirements at the campuses. This investment also aligns with Maine’s 10-Year Economic Development Strategy to attract more than 75,000 workers to join Maine’s talent pool.

I am a proud graduate of the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Southern Maine. I am particularly impressed with the ability for UMS to address college affordability over the last decade. When public and private institutions continued to raise tuition and fees year after year to address rising costs, UMS prioritized keeping these costs affordable to Maine students. As a former school counselor for many years, I know how important affordability is for Maine families. By prioritizing affordability, UMS has been able to keep student debt to a minimum. I also know how important infrastructure investment is because students and families often choose institutions based on their visits to the campuses. I worry that the continued infrastructure and deferred maintenance needs of UMS will have an impact on student enrollment. As public

universities across New England continue to invest in new, modern residence halls, research facilities, and basic improvements to aging buildings, Maine needs to invest too. We can't afford to lose students to other states because of better facilities.

My nephew is actually going through the college selection process now. He wants to be an engineer and has visited a variety of campuses both in and out of Maine to help him select what institution might be the best for him. I am proud to share that he is headed to the University of Maine as a first-year engineering student. The reason he chose the University of Maine was because of two primary reasons: the ability to learn in the new Ferland Engineering Education & Design Center and the affordability of tuition, fees, and room & board. I could not be happier about his decision. This is the kind of difference your investment in UMS makes. I strongly encourage you to support L.D. #460. Thank you for your time.

Jason Judd, Ed.D.
Educate Maine