

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and other members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Josh Kelley. I live in Bangor and am an associate professor of biochemistry at the University of Maine in the Department of Molecular and Biomedical Sciences.

I am speaking neither for nor against the current budget, which includes a welcome 4% increase in funding for UMaine.

My department prepares the next generation of healthcare workers, biotech employees, and biomedical researchers for the state of Maine, where life science jobs grew by 31% from 2018 to 2023. Without additional funding, our ability to support and advance this growth is in jeopardy.

Since I arrived at the University of Maine just over 8 years ago, our department has increased the number of degrees granted by 50%. Over this same period, we have grown our NIH funding from ~\$140,000 to ~\$1.8 million a year, including over \$400K in indirect costs that support the university's operations. I am one of a group of faculty that secured a record 11 million dollar NIH grant, the first of its kind at UMaine. In short, our department and our faculty are succeeding in every way. Despite these successes, constant budget crises have forced us to work in increasingly poor conditions for teaching and research.

Our departmental budget has decreased over this same time. Four professors have retired since I arrived, but we have only been able to replace two of them. Because of this, we are forced to waive course requirements for every graduating senior because we cannot teach them. We have had multiple failed searches because our pay is not competitive, and in fact, prospective faculty often face a pay cut to become a faculty member at UMaine.

Recently, budget shortfalls necessitated cutting support for our graduate Teaching Assistantships by 25%. Graduate students play an important role in our teaching mission and are the backbone of the research enterprise. This cut left us to find an additional \$70,000 a year to fulfill our obligation to pay our graduate students. This is larger than the department's yearly non-payroll budget. Grants could not easily absorb these cuts either because their budgets are set years in advance.

These ever-present budgetary problems are also evident in our degrading facilities. The HVAC fails multiple times a year, leading to failed experiments and uninhabitable labs (as high as 90 degrees with windows that don't open). Temperature swings and steam leaks have damaged microscopes worth upwards of a million dollars and destroyed ultracold freezers, leading to tens of thousands in equipment damage and incalculable research losses.

These challenges are not unique to my department. We are a microcosm of UMaine, where everyone is affected by continuous budget shortfalls and fiscal precarity. Despite these challenges, we remain committed to the university's educational and research mission. The proposed 4% increase is a good start. However, to maintain our success and provide Maine with the workforce that the future requires, we need funding increases that not only keep pace with inflation but also address deferred maintenance, staffing shortages, and employee pay. Thank you for your attention.