

Greetings, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and the other members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and also, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and the other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Michael Grillo, and I am a History of Art professor at the University of Maine. I live in the town of Penobscot. I am here today to testify neither for nor against the Governor's proposed budget.

While I and my colleagues are very thankful for the four percent increase in the state appropriation to the University of Maine System budget, we need recognize that with the recent inflation coupled with the longer term erosion of Higher Education funding over the last several decades, the seven universities have not been able to continue adequately to meet the needs of Maine's students. Particularly in an increasingly competitive world, one in which a higher education degree is essential for each individual's economic security, we owe our students our best, with an education that not only prepares them for current employment opportunities, but more importantly, prepares them to develop new economic opportunities that we cannot envision presently. For such a sustainable future, the universities have to offer a balance between specialized education that meets each fields' current best standards, and a broader interdisciplinary grounding in a diversity of supportive fields. If we are preparing our students for the current world alone, we are failing them. We need prepare them to create the future as creative leaders in their fields and in new fields unimaginable to us now but vital for the future.

Our universities are contracting, losing faculty and areas of study, all because of unsustainable funding. The few new faculty members whom we hire who achieve early career success through our colleagues' careful mentoring earn prestigious international recognition, such as the six at UMaine who received NSF (National Science Foundation) Career awards. Once they receive such distinguished recognition, however, other universities typically offer them positions at far greater salaries. Simply put, we're not competitive, with four of the six Career scholars these past few years wooed away to other institutions that offer much higher salaries and significantly more material support in extensive labs and such. Over the three plus decades that I have loyally remained at UMaine, even after better offers from others institutions, I have seen an increased difficulty in its ability to retain young faculty members who are leading in their fields. Couple these loses with increasing financial constraints that make replacement impossible.

For us to responsibly Fund Maines Future, we need additional state financial support that will go directly to each campus, with a focus on directly supporting excellent teaching, innovative research, and committed community development. We cannot afford to continue to erode our offerings, for as any evolutionary biologist will tell you, over specialization leads to extinction. Losing the comprehensive coverage of diverse fields, the very definition of university, may help temporarily balance a budget, but makes it impossible for us to teach our students with the full range of knowledge that they will need to lead, that's right, "dirigo", to build our state's future.

Thank you, Michael Grillo