

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 Amanda Gavin. I work at the University of Maine as a Research Assistant and Teaching Assistant as a part of my role as a PhD candidate. I live in South Portland, ME.

I am here to testify neither for nor against the Governor's proposed budget. We appreciate the Governor's proposal to increase the state appropriation to UMS by 4%, but I am here on behalf of my colleagues to urge the Legislature to do better to address the needs of UMS. This increase is a step in the right direction, but our University system need more support to live up to its teaching and research missions and its important role in our state.

I am a PhD candidate at UMaine. UMaine recently attained the Carnegie R1 status, meaning it is a top-tier research university. Two key criteria for this achievement is \$50 million in research spending and graduating 70 doctoral researchers for year. **This status would not be achieved without the work of PhD students like me who carry out world-class research that benefits the State of Maine.** I study water quality in lakes across the state. Healthy lakes are a cornerstone of our state: they provide some of the best drinking water in the country and are beloved by Mainers of all ages. It's estimated that Maine lakes are worth \$14 billion per year, and my water quality research contributes to the preservation of good water quality. This is just one of many examples of how graduate worker research at UMaine contributes to our state's economy. **However, graduate workers at the University of Maine are suffering.** Our pay and health insurance benefits are well below the status quo of our peer-institutions - and this can be connected to the lower level of state funding to UMS per enrolled student compared to other comparable schools.

To give you a sense of what this means for graduate workers like me: After adjusting for health insurance payments, a graduate worker at UMaine takes home \$7,000 less than a student at UNH and \$13,000 less than a student at UConn. This means we struggle to meet our basic needs. For me, I've accrued thousands of dollars of medical debt because my paychecks don't cover the cost of my health care. My peers have lived in their cars, rely on the food pantry, and probably haven't been to the dentist since they started graduate school. Many of us state and federal subsidies to scrape by. The graduate workers teaching or doing research at UMS should not also have to rely on food stamps and public assistance to survive.

Furthermore, the poor working conditions of graduate workers are a direct threat to maintain R1 status, which endangers the sustained innovation and economic impact from the university that our state needs. UMaine is right on the cusp of qualifying for R1 status - any reduction in the number of students recruited or retained in research degree programs means that we might lose this critical status. Competitive pay and benefits attract and retain graduate workers, and this is critical both for maintaining R1 status and supports the basic humanity of graduate workers who have been paid too little for too long. We urge the legislature to allocate additional funds for graduate workers and all the other UMS workers who make our system, which includes our flagship R1 institution, run.