

Testimony in Support of LD 506, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Research and Development and Commercialization

April 9, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Ed Cervone. I am the Director of External Relations at the University of New England (UNE). I submit this testimony on behalf of UNE in support of LD 506.

Maine's 10-Year Economic Development Strategy (and subsequent versions), vetted and supported by stakeholders statewide, makes a clear and strong commitment to increasing our financial investment in R&D. Public dollars play a critical role here. Those dollars provide the foundational infrastructure needed to conduct R&D and in turn attract matching dollars. These investments attract talent, which in turn creates wealth and opportunity. It is this growth loop which will drive the Maine economy, sustaining jobs in high-growth sectors statewide.

For over two decades, Maine has pursued a strategic vision to support innovation across the economy. There have been a number of important milestones and wins in that time and we are better off now than when we started. Unfortunately, Maine has not made the commitment to invest at a level commensurate with our lofty vision. As a result, we have not progressed as far as we want or as far as we need. Despite this, Maine is home to nationally and internationally recognized research centers making advancements in life sciences, biotech, renewable energy, advanced materials, forestry, agriculture, aquaculture, and marine sciences. These research centers need a strong State of Maine partner to send a clear message to the market that Maine is serious about R&D, that we support our R&D community, and that their investment will be valued.

The University of New England is proud to be an important part of Maine's R&D infrastructure with experts in life science, biotech, aquaculture, and marine science, to name a few. Our Office of Innovation and Office of Research and Scholarship support students, faculty, and professional staff to transform their research and ideas into market solutions with commercial viability.

Over the last 10 years, UNE researchers submitted total grant requests averaging nearly \$44 million each year with a success rate of approximately 45%. That has resulted in UNE receiving an average of nearly \$20 million annually in new grant awards.

UNE has a strong focus on workforce development in R&D and our undergraduate and graduate students, are directly involved with faculty-directed research projects. They are authors in peer-reviewed publications, presenters at national and international conferences, and work throughout UNE's labs and research centers on both Maine campuses. Approximately half of our undergraduates engage in research during their time at UNE.

Our faculty are nationally and internationally renowned experts in their fields, and are leading research projects across our programs and are receiving accolades for their achievements. They work with a growing network of external partners that include higher education institutions like the University of Maine, the Roux Institute, and Southern Maine Community College, as well as other research universities nationally and internationally. They collaborate with industry partners like MaineHealth, IDEXX, and the Bigelow Laboratory, to name a few. They also work with statewide and regional initiatives like Focus Maine, BioConnects New England, and with our UNE North partners in Iceland, Greenland, and Scandinavia to conduct research, address workforce gaps, and tackle economic development challenges within promising high-growth industries and sectors.

UNE research addresses critical topics that improve the lives of people and their communities. UNE and its partners are conducting research on aging and cognition, public health, pharmaceuticals, chronic pain, biomedicine, nutrition security, substance use prevention, obesity, aquaculture, concussion management, and many other important topics. We believe strongly in our motto: Innovation for a Healthier Planet.

R&D is a priority in our strategic plan and integral to our growth and sustainability as a higher education institution. Our support for this bill stems from the fact that we will do well when all of Maine's R&D community does well. Success, regardless of where it comes from, generates national and international attention. That attention grows confidence and leads to greater investment and to more talent relocating to Maine, bringing their innovative ideas that drive business in our heritage and new emerging industries.

Robert Solow won a Nobel Prize in Economics in 1987 for his theory of economic growth. He showed that 80% of economic growth comes from innovation (20% comes from doing the same thing faster and cheaper). If we want economic growth in Maine, we need to invest in the systems and supports that allow our people to innovate. This bond does just that. Maine's R&D community is ready to work with the State of Maine to build upon its meaningful financial investment in our people and our economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ed Cervone
Director of External Relations