



Teresa S. Pierce
Senator, District 25
Senate Majority Leader

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

6 Waites Landing Road
Falmouth, ME 04105

***Testimony of Senate Majority Leader Teresa S. Pierce introducing
LD 1014, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Develop Maine Talent and
Innovation by Improving the Infrastructure of the University of Maine System
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs***

April 15, 2025

Chair Rotundo, Chair Gattine, and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, my name is Teresa S. Pierce. I represent Senate District 25 which includes Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, Yarmouth (majority), Gray, and Long Island and also have the honor of serving as the Senate Majority Leader. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce LD 1014, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Develop Maine Talent and Innovation by Improving the Infrastructure of the University of Maine System."

The University of Maine System (UMS) is the largest public education system in our state, and in the last decade, has conferred more than 53,000 degrees. UMS has produced many of the nurses, educators, engineers, and business and community leaders working in our state today. They've also led exciting research that have helped to sustain our heritage industries, strengthen our public and environmental health, and grow our innovation economy and global competitiveness.

As a longtime member of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I have had an opportunity to see first-hand the outstanding work being done by UMS. I've been impressed with their efforts to increasingly promote **access** and **affordability**, and to be responsive to the needs of their students and companies and communities across Maine.

At the same time, I share the System's growing concern about the condition of its campuses. Having gone on many college tours, first with my daughter and most recently with my son, I know that facilities matter when selecting a school where postsecondary students will live and study for four or more years of their life. Modern infrastructure sends a message about the quality, value and experience a student can expect in return for one of their family's biggest and most important investments.

While the Legislature provided some ongoing capital improvement funding for the System, the Legislature has not passed a bond for much-needed infrastructure repairs and upgrades since 2018. The cost of that is a further deterioration of mission-critical facilities that were already outdated to foster modern workforce development and research, and in some cases, unsafe. I remember in 2015, when the University of Maine at Machias had to unexpectedly move faculty and students out of one of its buildings in the middle of February, after it was determined to be



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structurally unsafe and in danger of collapse. Soon after, the building had to be torn down. That was a wake-up call for the System, and the Legislature.

Since then, UMS has focused on developing a data-driven plan to right-size and improve its infrastructure for the future needs of Maine. Their leadership in informed capital planning has led the Maine Community College System, Maine Maritime Academy and even the State of Maine (DAFS) to recently join them in working with the same independent expert to annually evaluate needs, track progress, and plan strategic investments and space management. The recent findings of that collective analysis stated this: Without a significant infusion of capital, Maine public higher education infrastructure faces increased risk of system failure.

Today, of the more than \$2 billion of infrastructure investment needed among Maine's public postsecondary institutions, \$1.8 billion of that is within the University of Maine System. I like to think we can pay now, or we can pay more later both in the costs of lost opportunity for Maine students and our economy, and in increasing costs to renovate and rebuild campus facilities as they fall into disrepair.

I was proud to support the bond issue that brought needed funding to the three public higher education systems back in 2018. That was a good start. But the remaining need is so great, and so is the opportunity before us.

LD 1014 would send to voters a \$100 million general obligation bond. The bond provides funds, to be matched by private and other funds, to strategically improve infrastructure at all campuses of the University of Maine System. These are necessary investments to sustain and increase program enrollment, improve student success, meet the needs of Maine employers for more skilled workers and research-driven innovation and benefit the surrounding communities, for which campuses are often among the largest employers. Projects must be aligned with the universities' respective capital plans and consistent with the policies of the Board of Trustees and may include renovation, replacement, removal and repurposing of classrooms, research laboratories, residence halls, and other infrastructure.

In Maine's Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029, the Mills Administration has set the goal of 75,000 additional people in the workforce. The University of Maine System is essential to meeting that goal. This year, the System has more than 10,000 out-of-state students and according to a UMaine study, more than one-third will stay here to live and work after they graduate. The workforce of tomorrow will require continuous upgrading of knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet ever-changing market needs. And to support that culture of continuous learning, Maine will also need an education system that is accessible, affordable, and effective.



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The report underscores that a substantial investment in the University of Maine System would be a significant countermeasure and have a tremendous impact on our ability to meet this unquestionable need for our state. Maine has strong, talented, hard-working people. We don't have enough of them. This strategy forecasts a 65,000 person contraction in the workforce over the next ten years unless robust countermeasures are undertaken.

The report goes on to say that talent is the new currency. Maine is in competition with other states and the world to build and retain a creative and productive workforce, to attract knowledge industries, and to have a well-educated public that can make wise civic and policy decisions.

Our investment and continued support in our public university system will have a profound, immediate and lasting impact on these goals.

Thank you for your consideration. I know others are here today to speak to this bill, but I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.