

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

**Re: 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**

My name is Julian Blohm, I'm a political science student at the University of Maine, a student employee at the Maine Wild Blueberry Commission, and I am here to express my emphatic support for this bond issue to support the University of Maine.

Right now, the great State of Maine is at a turning point, and what will ultimately decide our fate is if young people are given the tools and guidance we need to make Maine a better place. LD 1014 is an excellent place to start, as it not only invests in crucial elements of the University of Maine, like research and infrastructure, but it sends a strong message to young people: that Maine's government is invested in their future.

Starting with research, it is more crucial now than ever that the University of Maine has enough funding to ride out these uncertain times. Recently, the federal government threatened to withhold funding for the University of Maine system, and this led to so much uncertainty that UMaine paused hiring graduate researchers. Not only does this take away opportunities for students who just graduated, but it also threatens UMaine's status as a top-tier research institution. Our research programs have historically done wonders for thousands of small Maine businesses and heritage industries, chief among them is wild blueberries, whose production has grown by 500% over the last 50 years in large part due to University of Maine research and extension. If industries want to remain competitive against other states and countries, it is imperative that LD 1014 passes so we can secure a bright future for University of Maine Research.

Another reason I support this legislation is that it addresses a can that has been kicked down the road far too many times: University of Maine infrastructure. At Umaine, Orono, over 80% of residence halls were constructed before 1975, and 61% of buildings have not undergone major renovations in the past 50 years. How can we expect students to value Maine's state educational institution when over half the buildings need renovation? The University of Maine System currently has \$1.6 billion in deferred maintenance. Many of the University's Maine dorms, classrooms, and campuses are crumbling. This will turn away the talented young Mainers we need to retain to remain competitive on a national scale. Thus, passing LD 1014 is essential for repairing UMaine's obsolete infrastructure and its reputation as a whole.

Investing in the University of Maine isn't just about improving its programs or fostering research, though; it's also about showing the young men and women of this state that we are serious about making Maine a state where they can thrive, raise a family, and earn a living. If we want to show we're serious about addressing UMaine's threatened research and graduate programs, crumbling infrastructure, and overall image in the minds of our talented young students, then passing LD 1014 is an absolute must.

Thank you for your time. I hope that you will support this legislation.