

Testimony in Support of
L.D. 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*
Roger Katz, UMS Board of Trustees, April 17, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs: My name is Roger Katz and I am honored to be a member of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System, where I chair the Finance, Facilities & Technology Committee. I am pleased to be here in support of L.D. 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.

As I am sure you have heard, there are many great things happening within our public universities, with growing enrollment despite demographic headwinds and increased student success and research impact

But we have many challenges, not the least of which is our aging infrastructure.

It is so easy to defer maintenance, to say, “we’ll get to that next year” and put long-term facility needs on the back burner, especially as we maintain tuition affordability and contractual commitments to our dedicated employees. We are doing our best to resist that.

With direction from the Board and the leadership of Chancellor Malloy, we are increasingly focused on these deferred maintenance issues. We are strategically selling off underutilized assets. We are looking for opportunities for public-private partnerships, such as the new Hotel Ursa on the Orono campus. And we are placing new emphasis on the strategic sale and demolition of buildings that have outlived their usefulness to our mission.

We are approaching our overall capital planning, including deferred maintenance, in a more thoughtful and analytic way than ever before through our multi-year planning process. We are using tools to undertake a useful life analysis for virtually every building we have, looking closely at usage rates, maintenance, and energy costs, and alignment with mission. Things aren’t perfect. But we are doing our best. One example: we have recently invested in renovations to aging dormitories in Presque Isle and Farmington to bring them into the 21st century. As a result, more students are now enrolling in those rural institutions and living on-campus, which we know will increase their likelihood of timely degree completion and reduce pressure on local housing markets. We continue our private fundraising efforts, and certainly are blessed by the generosity of many donors, especially the Harold Alfond Foundation

Of course, we continue to focus on targeted new construction for the future. Exhibit "A"? -- the UMaine Ferland Engineering Education and Design Center, which thanks to your past investment, is helping us double our output of the next generation of engineers and computing professionals our state will need.

But more is needed. We have not had a General Obligation bond since the Patriots last won the Super Bowl, Cooper Flagg was 11 years old, and I was a member of this esteemed Committee. It is the longest we have gone in our System's history without one, although we do get an annual debt service appropriation from the Legislature, for which we are grateful. We hope to use funds from a bond issue on targeted demolition, modernizing UMaine's research facilities to sustain our R1 status and increase our positive impact on Maine's innovation economy, deferred maintenance at other campuses to improve recruitment and retention, and ensure those community cornerstones are meeting local needs.

Knowing what I know now about our public universities' tremendous fiscal stewardship under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Low, their tremendous need, and their tremendous importance to this state, I wish I had taken investing in this System more seriously when I was sitting where you are. You have a chance with L.D. 1014 to do what I did not.

I know we have all heard it 1,000 times: the State budget and spending are a statement of our values. As we think about our current workforce and economy, and our children and grandchildren, our public universities have never been more important. I hope you will agree and will authorize this bond issue so that we can make the case to the people of Maine at the ballot box.