



THE JACKSON LABORATORY

LEADING THE SEARCH FOR TOMORROW'S CURES

**PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY  
IN SUPPORT OF LD 1643**

April 24, 2025

**An Act to Establish the Maine Life Science Innovation Center**

Joint Standing Committee on  
Housing and Economic Development

Submitted by Michael McKernan  
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Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed members of the Joint Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Michael McKernan. I am Director, Government and Community Relations at The Jackson Laboratory, and a resident of Bar Harbor. I am pleased to testify in support of L.D. 1643, *An Act to Establish the Maine Life Science Innovation Center*.

The Jackson Laboratory is an independent, nonprofit, biomedical research institution headquartered in Bar Harbor, with a major campus in Ellsworth, and facilities in Augusta and Portland. JAX has, over many years, championed strategic investments that have helped Maine attract and retain businesses, foster talent and grow the life sciences workforce, and increase the state's ability to attract outside investment. These initiatives have yielded significant returns including research and commercial activity resulting in a statewide 31% increase in job growth in the life sciences in the last five years.

Over a similar period, research in life sciences has led to groundbreaking discoveries that will not only benefit our health and quality of life, but will also increase opportunity for commercial life sciences ventures. Since 2018, the first CRISPR-based gene-editing treatment was approved for sickle cell disease; AI-based platforms were developed to accelerate drug discovery; and, organoids and "organs-on-a-chip" provided new platforms for research on complex three-dimensional human tissues *in vitro*. In the last five years, in Maine, JAX delivered precision medicine to rural cancer patients through the Maine Cancer Genomics Initiative; advanced gene therapies for spinal muscular atrophy and multiple sulfate deficiency through the work of the Rare Disease Translational Center; and, has recently discovered potential biomarkers for Alzheimer's disease through non-invasive retinal imaging. This research, combined with innovative projects at MaineHealth, The University of Maine, University of New England, and MDI Biological Laboratory has collectively added hundreds of millions of dollars to the Maine economy and supported tens of thousands of good paying jobs.

Within this context of groundbreaking and accelerating scientific discovery, the time is right for Maine to establish an independent innovation hub, to align state funding, policy, and partnerships across sectors to advance the life sciences.

With respect to JAX goals and priorities, the Maine Life Science Innovation Center will serve

several key functions. First, the Center will identify gaps, track progress, and inform policy using real-time data and performance metrics. This information will be a critical resource in the development of major proposals and grant applications and will help applicants demonstrate that the objectives of an institutional effort are aligned with a statewide plan. Second, the Center will help build the necessary talent to grow the life sciences industry. The Center will align workforce training programs with actual industry needs, will partner with schools and workforce boards to expand STEM career pathways statewide, and will develop credentialing and upskilling opportunities to fill talent gaps. Finally, the Center will strengthen Maine's competitive edge. The Center will position Maine to secure federal and philanthropic investment by coordinating grant readiness efforts, it will raise Maine's national visibility as a hub for biomedical and resource-based life sciences, and it will leverage public-private partnerships to attract capital and grow capacity.

Now is the right time for Maine to establish the Life Science Innovation Center. Every year of delay means missed grants, lost talent, and fewer startups launched here in Maine. Maine risks falling behind neighboring states that are already investing. The Maine Life Sciences Center will help a critical sector gain additional ground. I urge the Committee vote this bill "ought to pass."