

**University of Maine System Testimony
Regarding LD 1012, An Act to Fund the Operations of the University of Maine
Cooperative Extension Tick Laboratory — Presented by UMS Chief External &
Governmental Affairs Officer Samantha Warren — April 23, 2025**

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans & Legal Affairs: My name is Sam Warren and I am the Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer for the University of Maine System (UMS).

In 2014, the Legislature and Maine voters generously funded the construction of **the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Diagnostic and Research Laboratory (DRL) to bring Extension scientists — including our students — together under one roof**. Today, the lab supports world-class aquatic animal health research necessary to the development of the state's aquaculture and biotechnology sectors; veterinary diagnostic services vital for vets, game wardens and pet owners; plant disease testing that farmers depend on for crop management; and testing of ticks and other insects for you and your constituents.

Since the DRL opened in 2018, ticks have expanded their range and their resilience, leading to **increased demand on our lab from Mainers** who want to know the type of tick they have encountered and what diseases it may carry so they can make earlier and better informed healthcare decisions. **In 2024, 4,776 ticks were submitted to the lab from 398 Maine communities**. More than half tested positive for at least one pathogen, including 41.5% of Blacklegged tick submissions containing the causative agents of Lyme disease.

Cooperative Extension's statewide activities are supported within UMaine's existing and increasingly constrained budgetary resources and by other local, state, and federal competitive and formula funds as well as program revenue. An annual State appropriation of \$250,000 directly supports the operations of the tick lab, including testing, education, outreach, and research. Because of this ongoing State commitment, for example, the DRL lab is able to charge Mainers \$20 per tick test, compared to \$57 for just Lyme disease and upwards of \$127 for the full testing panel at the University of Connecticut — now the nearest public university lab that also provides this important service. Additionally, it allows us to undertake PK-12 efforts like the 4-H Tick Project, through which Maine youth collect, identify, and learn about ticks while also contributing to UMaine research.

There is strong bipartisan support for the tick lab. For example, after UMS and stakeholders agreed to a repeal of a pesticide container fee in the 131st Legislature, Governor Mills proposed doubling the lab's annual appropriation to \$500,000, which was unanimously supported by your colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (ACF). And in the 132nd Legislature, Rep. Katrinia Smith

(R-Palermo) sponsored a bill to increase funding for the lab, which was also unanimously supported by the ACF Committee. In both efforts, General Fund dollars were sought and ultimately not secured during the competitive appropriations process.

Earlier this session, you heard from Chancellor Malloy that State funding has not kept up with the System's rising operating costs and that our region-leading affordability has limited revenue growth from student tuition, despite enrollment increases. He shared that this has required difficult choices, including a UMS-wide hiring freeze, retrenching of faculty and staff, incentivizing faculty retirement, and leaving positions vacant. You should know that UMaine Cooperative Extension has not been immune to those impacts and has had to restructure some staff and services to do more with less. Additionally, the DRL's activities have been directly and negatively impacted by the termination and pausing of federal grants and contracts.

We appreciate Sen. Farrin's recognition that this lab is a state asset and his creative proposal to provide ongoing increased funding to support its critical work. While UMS defers to the Legislature, the Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages and Lottery Operations, and the State Liquor and Lottery Commission as to whether an instant lottery ticket like the one proposed by LD 1012 is an appropriate way to generate revenue for this purpose, **additional funding for the tick lab will be essential to our ability to maintain affordability testing and expand education and outreach efforts that will better protect Maine people and wildlife from potentially deadly tick-borne diseases.** Thank you for your continued commitment to University of Maine Cooperative Extension and Maine's public universities.