Testimony In Support of Funding for the University of Maine System
FY22-23 Biennial Budget (LD 221)
Presented by Mitch Sanborn, Manager of Process Engineering for Enercon Technologies, Gray
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Senators Breen and Daughtry, Representatives Pierce and Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs: My name is Eliot Mitchell Sanborn- my friends and colleagues call me "Mitch." I am here today to speak on behalf of my employer, Enercon Technologies, as well as many other local business who have benefited from working with Maine's public universities in support of the funding in the State budget for the University of Maine System, including its research, development and commercialization capacity (MEIF).

I am a lifelong resident of Maine, attending college at Southern Maine Community College as well as the University of Southern Maine. The programs I took at USM were instrumental in me achieving several of my career goals, specifically, in the area of leadership and lean manufacturing.

My professional career began about 30 years ago where I was a tool and die maker for Nichols Portland. In 1999, my career took me to Lanco Integrated, a Westbrook-based company that specializes in the designing and manufacturing of custom automated assembly machines. At Lanco, I pursued a new path as a mechanical design engineer. During my 20-year tenure at Lanco, I held many positions ranging from Project Engineer to Project Manager and Manufacturing Manager. During this period, I received professional certifications from USM for Leadership, Supervision, Lean Six Sigma Green Belt and Lean Six Sigma Black Belt.

It was during my time as Lanco's Manufacturing Manager where I began collaborating with John Belding, the Director of the Advanced Manufacturing Center at University of Maine in Orono. John, as well as his staff of professional engineers and engineering students, worked with me on several projects primarily supporting the design and building of custom automated assembly equipment for various industries. This partnership allowed Lanco to secure these projects, which may have been awarded elsewhere if not for their support.

Last March, I joined the Enercon Technologies team as their Manager of Process Engineering. Enercon Technologies is a fully integrated Design and Build Center for electronics instrumentation specializing in medical devices, life sciences, military and industrial instrumentation. In the simplest terms, we take an idea from our customers, sometimes one drawn on a napkin, and design that into a product that we will make in our manufacturing facility. Enercon is a privately owned company, which was founded over 40 years ago and now employs nearly 300 people in their Gray facility.

On my very first day at Enercon, we had a company meeting where our General Manager, Ryan Marcotte, explained to the employees what our role would be in the fight against the coronavirus. Our customers' products are being used on the front lines of the pandemic battle and the need for a

significant increase of the volumes of these products was required. To support this need, my role was to work with the Enercon teams and per our motto, do “whatever it takes” to meet this need.

I decided to integrate several automated systems to assist our production teams in meeting our goals. This included onboarding several collaborative robotic systems to help with various testing and part handling of some of the components used in these products. It was at this point where I reached out to the AMC at University of Maine to help us with this challenge. John and his team did not hesitate. Their task would be to design and manufacture custom tray handling systems that the robots would be interacting with. These systems would be one of many systems needed to help with our customers product be deployed for fighting COVID-19. Our partnership with the university gave me the confidence we would be able to meet our customers’ production requirements. This in turn made us able to hire a significant number of new employees at a time when many Mainers were losing their jobs. We are still hiring today. Had it not been for the commitment and collaboration of the Enercon team and the team at the university, our customers may have been forced to seek assistance from other manufacturers outside the state of Maine.

Enercon is one of hundreds of Maine companies and small businesses that depend on the expertise and equipment available at the University of Maine and other universities with the University of Maine System, as well as the workforce they prepare and we in-turn hire. We know State funding is critical to the universities’ ability to meet our needs to grow our businesses and the overall economy and hope you will continue to provide them this support.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.