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Ellen Belknap, President SMRT Architecture, Engineering, Planning and UMaine Board of Visitors

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to give testimony in strong support of two critical investments for the University of Maine System in Governor Mills' supplemental budget. I am Ellen Belknap, President of SMRT Architecture, Engineering and Planning and a member of the University of Maine Board of Visitors.

I made my choice to live and work in Maine 35 years ago; I've been a part of growing SMRT from an 8 person firm in 1984 to now 120 people with offices across the northeast. Our work is complex – designing hospitals, laboratories, justice facilities, specialty manufacturing plants, education centers, all designed with a huge focus on energy optimization. This requires deep engineering expertise. Maine has a huge shortage of engineers. SMRT currently has job openings in ALL of our engineering disciplines.

My biggest challenge, what keeps me awake at night, is access to talent. SMRT relies on Black Bears, graduates from UMaine in Civil, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering. We can't get enough of these grads. The time is now to invest in the University of Maine. Education is absolutely key to growing Maine's economic vitality.

We need to do two things:

- 1) Keep UMaine tuition affordable to attract and retain students and
- 2) Invest in critical infrastructure

We have chronically underfunded the infrastructure on UMaine campuses for decades. I'm most familiar with the Orono campus where the level of deferred maintenance is frankly shocking. 60% of the building stock has a renovation age of more than 50 years old. I'm a huge fan of historic buildings but they require ongoing maintenance, envelope upgrades, contemporary heating and cooling systems, energy optimization and new tel/data systems. Absent these

improvements, they consume more energy than necessary and are not flexible and adaptable to today's uses of technology and education models.

UMaine's campus infrastructure today vastly underrepresents the caliber of the institution. The university was recently recognized as one of the nation's highest performing research universities with the R-1 designation. A casual walk across the campus does not reflect top tier facilities where pioneering, cutting-edge research is happening. And yet it IS. I'm in awe of what UMaine is doing in Bio-Medical Engineering, Composites Research, Climate Science and so much more.

Supporting affordable, accessible post-secondary education for Maine families in facilities that meet the needs of teaching and research, are flexible and adaptable to the needs of tomorrow and environmentally sustainable is critical to building a bright future for Maine.

I urge you to support this funding for the UMaine System in the FY 22-23 Supplemental Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome your questions.

Ellen Belknap, President SMRT