

# Investing in Maine's Future: UMS Part II Budget Priorities



***“The University of Maine System is a cherished public asset deserving of State support.”***

-Hon. Patrick Flood, University of Maine System Trustee

The 10-year state strategic plan identifies talent and innovation as *the* two primary drivers of economic growth that will benefit all Mainers. **Maine's public universities are the state's largest producer of talent and innovation.** In the last decade, the University of Maine System (UMS) has awarded 56,000 degrees, led by those for in-demand Maine careers in nursing/healthcare, business, engineering and education.

Increased investment in UMS recommended by Gov. Mills and the Education Committee recognizes that the most proven path to social mobility for Mainers and economic prosperity for our state is affordable, high-quality public university education and research. For example, working age alumni of UMaine earn more than double the state's average median income and pay nearly 50% more in state income taxes. Proposed appropriations also address historic underfunding. When adjusted for inflation, State investment in UMS has declined over the last decade and now comprises a smaller share of the General Fund budget than ever before, while during that same period, our universities have held tuition flat for Maine families seven times.

## **Pay Our Public Employees and Minimize Student Debt (E&G, Unvoted – Line 94)**

Operational increases of 4.5% year-over-year are necessary to sustain our public universities amidst unprecedented inflation, meet obligations to world-class faculty and staff, and minimize tuition increases for Maine families. Still, the proposed \$9.5M in added FY24 State funding falls far short of the \$20M increased cost of bargained employee compensation and \$10M increase in campus energy prices.

## **Accelerate Commercially Promising Research & Maine's Economy (MEIF, Unvoted – Line 95)**

Maine ranks 44<sup>th</sup> among states for R&D spending, and business leaders have called on the State to triple R&D investment to diversify and strengthen the economy. The Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF) has a 6:1 rate of return and enables UMS universities — led by the R1 UMaine — to directly support Maine companies and provide students paid hands-on research learning. The \$6M in additional MEIF appropriations recommended by the Education Committee will allow UMS to prepare graduates to be problem-solvers and innovators in the workforce, develop research-driven solutions to critical challenges confronting the state (like PFAS and affordable housing), and help companies here grow and create more great-paying Maine jobs.

## **Improve Infrastructure, Student Success & Workforce Readiness (Budget Amendment, LDs 460 & 1871)**

A commitment to affordability has come at a high cost to the UMS physical plant, now burdened by \$1.6B in deferred maintenance. More than half of all campus facilities and three-quarters of residence halls have not been meaningfully renovated in at least 50 years. The bipartisan LD 460, endorsed by the Education Committee, asks voters to invest \$100M to improve UMS infrastructure while LD 1871 requests \$35M. If bonds are not pursued in 2023, UMS urges the Legislature to provide an additional \$10M in ongoing debt service to finance \$100M in urgent capital projects, including construction of the UMaine Green Engineering & Materials Factory of the Future (GEM), modernization of residence halls to increase student recruitment and retention and ease demand on local housing units, and removal of underutilized space to reduce energy usage and O&M costs.

## **Ensure Equitable College Access, Opportunity for All Maine Students (LD 512)**

Building on the early success of free community college and recognizing the importance of providing Maine students equitable access to public higher education, the Education Committee recommended \$6.7M ongoing to launch a free university initiative that would enable Pell-eligible Maine students to attend UMS without having to pay any out-of-pocket tuition costs. (This is an amended version of LD 512.)

## Maine Students & Employers Urge You to Invest in UMS

*"I am here to **advocate for the UMaine System remaining a school of choice, not default, for our students** as well as attracting those from New England and beyond. Maine relies on a steady supply of our well-educated graduates. Providing this leadership again will ensure we are all working together toward the common goal of having the quality on our campuses to grow enrollment, drive research, attract corporate internships and meet the obligation for community and economic development that our System is intended to serve."* Rebecca Swanson Conrad, Chair of the USM Board of Visitors

*"Before I came here to attend UMaine, I had never even visited New England. At UMaine, I've been able to carry out independent research, and explore innovative solutions for agricultural problems, including a project that utilizes recovered lobster shell waste and repurposes it as a soil amendment to improve plant growth, and potentially suppress soilborne diseases. This is exciting work and **exemplifies the potential solutions that can be unlocked within our state with your support of public university education and research.**"* Katie Ashley, Orono, University of Maine Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Trustees

*"The rural areas of this state have amazing individuals with incredible experiences, and I want those folks to know that **the University of Maine System has a pathway for them to grow, to thrive, and to contribute.** No mind should be left behind in the state of Maine. We need to keep tuition affordable and primary research accessible to tap into this incredible pool of talent."* Barbara Kerr Hamilton, UMaine '82, Senior Director of Corporate Technology, Packaging Corporation of America

*"**Your investment in the University of Maine System is an investment in my future and in Maine's future.** These extraordinary public institutions offer accessibility, education, empathy, opportunity and strengthen the economy and our communities in ways that Maine depends on. Your increased funding will not only keep more Maine students here, but signal to students and families in other states that this is a place worth coming to for college, and to stay to live and work for a lifetime. Our public institutions are Maine's future."* Bri Demaso, Brewer, University of Southern Maine Student Body President

*"**Boldly increasing investment in UMS R&D is essential to achieving a vibrant and sustainable economy** for Maine and consistent with the Growth Council's long-standing recommendation to triple Maine's R&D spending by 2030."* Stephen Von Vogt, Co-Chair, Maine Economic Growth Council

*"Through ongoing partnership and collaboration with the University of Maine, our industry has increased the production of this healthy berry 500% over the last 50 years. **Our excellent partners at UMaine have helped to transform Maine's iconic wild blueberry industry into the economic powerhouse it is today** and are critical as we seek to overcome new challenges to create a vibrant and sustainable future for our industry."* Eric Venturini, Executive Director, Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine

*"This bond proposes investment at a time that couldn't possibly be more important. Not only is there incredible need but also the System, in general, and UMaine, in particular, are at a crossroads, poised to be leaders in truly important areas of research and development. From sensor technology and large-scale 3D printing with composite materials to the development of wind technology and the study of climate change, **UMaine, and our System, is ready to lead far-reaching economic benefits for Maine people and beyond.**"* Michael Bourque, UMaine '89, President/CEO, MEMIC

*"The **symbiotic relationship between the university lab and industry is a differentiator for Maine, and the perfect example of how industry, academia and the state can work together to create nationally leading industries.**"* Sean Sullivan, Executive Director, Maine Brewers' Guild

### Other UMS Appropriations Priorities

**LD 1608** (Sen. Pierce): \$1M ongoing to provide Maine PK-12 schools 100 "resident" educators each year through UMS-led statewide residency program that addresses critical teacher workforce shortage.

**LD 1817** (Sen. Brenner/Rep. Carlow): \$6.2M ongoing for immersive outdoor school for all Maine students, administered by University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

**LD 1021** (Rep. Smith): \$250,000 ongoing for UMaine Extension tick lab testing and public outreach.

**LD 129** (Sen. Baldacci): \$150,000 one-time for UMS to study feasibility of a rural public medical school.

**Unvoted Initiative, Line 123** (Governor/FAME): \$500 increase in need-based Maine State Grant.