Maine's Public Universities
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

**Testimony of Joan Ferrini-Mundy, University of Maine System Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation and University of Maine President, In Support of LD 1733, *An Act To Provide Allocations for the Distribution of State Fiscal Recovery Funds* – June 9, 2021**

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Good afternoon, Senator Breen, Representative Pierce and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Joan Ferrini-Mundy. I am the University of Maine System's Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation and president of the state's only public research university, the University of Maine, and its regional campus in Machias. I am here to ask for your support of the $35 million direct allocation proposed in the Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan (LD 1733) for the state's largest education and research enterprise.

When the Mills Administration approached UMS with this terrific opportunity, we turned to the state's 10-year economic strategy and the recommendations of the recovery committee to inform our development of a plan to most meaningfully deploy these one-time dollars. Both made clear that to achieve maximum economic benefit, Maine must make investments that leverage existing strengths – especially those of the University of Maine – to capitalize on our state's unique assets – most notably our natural resources – and global market trends.

Given this, our System proposes to use these American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to build critical infrastructure for Maine's economy, including by investing in the public university centers and laboratories that directly support the state's companies and strengthen our heritage industries and dependent rural communities. Coupled with each of these planned capital projects is an expansion of paid internship and other high-impact work learning opportunities that prepare UMS students for high-wage Maine careers in growing sectors that add value to our economy.

In the interest of your time, I have attached to my written testimony a high-level summary of each of these projects. I'd like to highlight just a few here today, and remind you that past public investment in UMS R&D has generated a more than 5:1 return:

Maine's path to prosperity and economic resiliency relies on adding value to the renewable resources of our forest, farms and sea through innovation. Using wood and wood residuals, we plan to manufacture large-scale 3D-printed objects including rapid military and industry prototypes, affordable housing, clean energy components and durable transportation solutions at the Green Engineering and Materials Factory of the Future, which will be

constructed at UMaine 

using ARPA funds. Co-located with our Advanced Structures and Composites Center, GEM will be a world-class research and educational facility where the next generation manufacturing and engineering workforce will be developed through hands-on research learning in partnership with local companies. The project has attracted strong interest, and likely significant investment toward its $72 million total cost, from the U.S. Department of Defense.

UMS ARPA funds will also address gaps in Maine's food entrepreneurship ecosystem, building food testing/quality services labs and shared-use kitchens at UMaine to serve small food-based businesses and ensure Mainers have reliable access to healthy and safe local food. We will replace our obsolete 1920's-era Aroostook Farm Research & Education Center in Presque Isle with a modern, biosecure facility that better serves our agricultural industry and government partners, enhancing our successful potato-breeding program and capacity for crop trials of other vegetable varieties to ensure greater yields and adaptability to changing climates. And we will construct a new sustainable aquaculture training and innovation center with state-of-the-art cold water facilities to develop a workforce and new Maine businesses in this fast-growing sector.

Of course, our state's greatest natural resource is its people. As you well know, the pandemic has exacerbated Maine's lack of access to affordable, high quality childcare that is essential to the development of our children and their parents' ability to participate fully in the workforce. Through its Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center, for four decades the University of Maine at Farmington has provided Franklin County families nationally accredited early learning while preparing the state's future early childhood educator workforce. ARPA investment will help UMF complete the renovation of a former call-center into a 10,000 square foot state-of-the-art childcare and academic center, creating 20 new infant/toddler slots and allowing the university to increase enrollment in its early childhood education and special education degree programs by at least 20%. This program growth is made all the more urgent by the State's recent commitment to expand public Pre-K, for which a four-year teaching degree is typically required.

As Chancellor Malloy recently shared with you, our System is burdened by a backlog of $1.3 billion in imminent infrastructure need and deferred maintenance. These $35 million in ARPA funds obviously will not fully address that, but will leverage other public and private investments including from our ongoing State appropriation and the Harold Alfond Foundation, to

maximize and make more immediate their impact on our students and our state. These shovel-ready projects will create short-term construction jobs while accelerating the talent development and innovation necessary for Maine's equitable recovery, long-term economic growth and global competitiveness.

We ask for your support of this allocation, as well as the additional appropriations for our System and our students in the supplemental budget.

I would additionally note that our universities, and especially UMaine, see tremendous synergy between our strengths, Maine's opportunities and other components of the Administration's Jobs & Recovery plan. We look forward to collaborating with the beneficiaries of competitive innovation funding made available through the Maine Technology Institute, in-part by utilizing the university facilities and talent I discussed with you today. As I shared with you earlier this session, despite it being the ultimately driver of economic growth, Maine's total R&D spending is down nearly one-third from where it was prior to the Great Recession and currently ranks in the bottom five of all U.S. states. The plan before you today gives our public and private sector research and development enterprise a chance to catch up, and move Maine forward.

Thank you and I look forward to answering your questions.