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1 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0001

Paul R. LePage

GOVERNOR

March 4, 2016

Hon. Samuel W. Collins
Chairman, Board of Trustees
University of Maine System
16 Central Street
Bangor, Maine 04401

Dear Chairman Collins:

Thank you for the progress that the Board has made toward making public higher education more affordable, aspirational and accessible to every Maine community. You have had to make tough decisions in order to close the structural gap and I appreciate the commitment, from both the Trustees and the Chancellor, to sound fiscal management at the University of Maine System.

Maine is the only state in the country to reduce the inflation-adjusted cost of a four-year public education over the last five years, and much of the credit for that accomplishment is due to the System's five-year tuition freeze. Throughout Maine, I regularly speak about the need to lower the cost of education, reduce student debt, and attract and retain young people to address Maine's demographic challenges. Affordable tuition at our public university system is critical to making this a reality.

I am writing to encourage the Board of Trustees to extend the tuition freeze for the 2016-2017 academic year.

Should the Board of Trustees extend the tuition freeze for an additional academic year, I am prepared to submit a supplemental budget to the Legislature that will request additional funding for the University of Maine System. ***My budget proposal will replace 100 percent of the revenue that would have been generated by a 2.3 percent inflation-based adjustment to tuition in the 2016-2017 academic year, approximately \$4.65 million.***

Eventually university leaders will need to increase tuition modestly to keep pace with inflation. The One University Initiative is off to a good start, and I hope to see that progress continue. The improvement in credit transfers is an example of what can be accomplished when we make common sense reforms to increase access to affordable higher education. Continued improvement will allow me to seriously consider an increase in funding for public higher education in my FY18/19 biennial budget.



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In order to achieve the transformational change we need in Maine, we must do more than reduce the comparative cost of credit hours. We must expand access to public higher education so that a college degree or a credential is achievable for learners of all ages, locations, and backgrounds.

As a result, my FY17 supplemental budget submission will also include resources to help with these initiatives, including the following specific items:

- **Early College Initiative:** More than 2,000 Maine high school students in well over half of Maine's high schools will earn college credits through our universities at little or no cost to their families this academic year. This is a 45 percent increase over the last two academic years and is giving Maine's most promising students an early and affordable start down the path to a college degree. *\$1,000,000 in one-time funding will be included in my supplemental budget to maintain the growth of University Early College Initiatives and extend their reach into even more Maine high schools.*
- **PreLaw Undergraduate Scholars Program:** The University of Maine School of Law PLUS Program will increase professional degree attainment in Maine and diversity in the legal profession by helping first-generation, rural, low-income, or racially and ethnically underrepresented Maine college students gain the skills and understanding needed to pursue careers and business opportunities through legal education. *\$550,000 in one-time funding will be included in my supplemental budget to match \$300,000 in grant funding already committed to the program.*
- **Maine Adult Education Completion Scholarship:** 200,000 Mainers have some college credit but have stopped short of obtaining a career-advancing degree or credential. Established in the 126th Legislature, the Maine Adult Education Completion Scholarship Program has provided 246 stranded adult learners across 94 Maine communities with an average of \$1,378 per semester to resume progress to a degree in Maine's Universities. *\$1,000,000 in one-time funding will be included in my supplemental budget to help fund approximately 700 semesters of college completion work.*

As we work toward transformational change in public higher education, we must also consider investments in the facilities, technology and infrastructure needed to sustain our campuses and extend the reach of services and programs into every Maine community. I encourage the Board of Trustees and university leaders to develop a strategic, long-term investment plan that advances higher education in Maine for inclusion in a bond package to go before Maine voters.

Please extend my appreciation and best wishes to all of the Trustees, university leaders, and community members working to position the University of Maine System for continued success.

Sincerely,



Paul R. LePage
Governor