

Week of November 9

Trustees,

With your regular November Board morning tomorrow, with a morning executive session and a full afternoon public agenda, I'll keep today's weekend update brief.

Because we expect as many as 30 members of the public to speak during public comment about retiree health care, I'd like to start with a few points of information about our progress to date before we meet tomorrow.

As of mid week, 1,029 of our retirees and their dependents have completed enrollment in a new exchange-based supplemental medicare retiree health plan to be funded by UMS contributions to a health reimbursement account. That number represents essentially one-third of our total retiree/dependent cohort and, according to Aon, is appropriate progress toward our December 31 target for enrolling the full cohort.

And despite the stories we've seen in the media recently, many of our retirees have had positive experiences with the transition. Attached you'll find a confidential collection of comments maintained by Aon that demonstrates that our and Aon's proactive engagement with our retirees is largely well-received and supportive. It will be helpful to keep these comments in mind as we hear public comment tomorrow. (And I do want to stress the confidential nature of these comments. The document should not be distributed further and its contents should not be quoted verbatim in public.)

Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Ryan Low will report tomorrow on our progress on a comprehensive initiative to provide impartial advice, counsel and direction to retirees and their qualified dependents who may need help *independent from* UMS, Aon, and the insurance plans. An ombudsman will be retained to be the point person to field inquiries, assure they are addressed, and make regular reports to the Board of Trustees about the progress of implementation and any issues that are unresolved. The ombudsman will be supported through a contract with a consortium of five area agencies on aging to access the State Health Insurance Program, an independent and well established health insurance assistance program that can provide information and answer questions about Medicare, Medicare supplemental plans, Medicare Advantage, Part D Drug coverage, and MaineCare.

Ryan and Chief of Staff and General Counsel Jim Thelen will also summarize our continued engagement with UMS's labor partners and their representatives. We believe we've established a constructive communication channel with them, and find that our conversations are most productive when we focus on facts instead of fears, as well as the good work done to support retirees who've already made the transition. In that vein, Ryan and Jim can speak to our current thinking on future indexing for UMS's HRA contributions as a way to respond to our labor partners' concerns.

Important work remains. There was news this week that State Senator Rebecca Millett, Senate Chair of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, plans to introduce legislation that, according to [a press release from her office](#), will protect UMS retiree health benefits. We will engage with Sen. Millett and other legislative leaders as constructively as possible, with the goal of protecting your fiduciary responsibility to manage the University of Maine System.

The ongoing COVID pandemic remains top of mind as well, especially as community transmission and new cases continue to grow all around us. To be sure, we are now monitoring more than 40 cases across the University of Maine System, the highest number of active cases we've seen thus far this semester. But key to our ability to safely continue our in-person operations is that affected employees and commuter students are often able to isolate and quarantine off campus, typically in their own residences. As of yesterday, there were only five active cases among our residential student population -- two at UMaine, and one each at Farmington, Fort Kent, and Southern Maine. Roughly 95 percent of our isolation and quarantine capacity remains available for our use, making our on-campus communities among the safest places to be at present. Strict discipline to our health and safety protocols remains necessary, of course, and we've further curtailed all but the most necessary travel and in-person interaction. And as we [look ahead](#) to our students departing for Thanksgiving and the end of the in-person portion of our fall semester, we will be providing COVID testing for all out-of-state and residential students and other special groups so that our community members can have confidence they are not taking the virus with them when they leave.

We remain engaged in all of our work, including on our most strategic and significant initiatives. President Joan Ferrini-Mundy and Jim Thelen and I hosted a Zoom meeting this week of a number of university leaders who will lead the Harold Alfond Foundation-funded initiatives for the Maine Center, student success and retention, UMaine Division 1 athletics, and the Maine College of Engineering, Computing, and Information Sciences. Our Presidents and Law School Dean Leigh Saufly met this week on Wednesday as well for their monthly Presidents' Council meeting. While this group meets virtually twice a week for brief updates on pandemic-related operations and information, the monthly Presidents' Council meeting is a time for more substantive engagement with the Presidents and Dean Saufley and our System leadership team on our most important collaborative work, and this week's meeting included probing discussions about our unified accreditation work and university input in our initial Statewide Strategic Program Plans.

We ended the week with a particularly important engagement. Governor Mills visited the University of Maine to tour the Advanced Structures and Composites Center and talk with President Ferrini-Mundy and university leaders further about offshore wind technology, advanced manufacturing support, and the university's wastewater testing capacity. With the possibility of financial support or reimbursement for the substantial COVID testing we've already done and have yet to do, we will continue our active engagement with the Governor's office on these topics.

Significant and important work remains before us, and I look forward to discussing it with you further tomorrow.

Regards,
Dan