

Chancellor Dannel P. Malloy
State of the University of Maine System Address
to the Joint Convention of the 132nd Maine Legislature - Tuesday, March 11, 2025

President Daughtry, Speaker Fecteau, Senate Minority Leader Stewart, House Minority Leader Faulkingham, honorable members of the 132nd Maine Legislature, President Daigler, Interim President Johnson, UMS Trustees, Presidents and Boards of Visitors leaders, distinguished guests and partners:

My name is Dannel Malloy, and I am proud to serve as Chancellor of your public university system.

I stand before you today as proof of the transformative power of public education.

I was born with severe learning and physical challenges. It was suggested I was, as the term was used at the time, mentally retarded, and assumed I would never amount to much.

My mother was a nurse who raised eight children. She would not let my learning differences determine my destiny. Thanks to my mother and my fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Mitchell, who saw my potential and accommodated my special needs, I was able to graduate high school, college, and even law school.

My dyslexia and my physical disabilities make it difficult to deliver speeches from a script, so please be patient with me. I have very good news to share.

My personal experience has also impressed upon me the incredible importance of meeting all students where they are.

And that is just what Maine's public universities are doing.

Because of this, I stand before you proud to report that the state of the University of Maine System is strong, and innovative.

Despite the disadvantages of demographics and our inadequate infrastructure, Maine's public universities have increased enrollment for four consecutive semesters. This fall, we experienced our first undergraduate enrollment growth in at least two decades and

welcomed the most transfer students in a decade. More students are pursuing master's and doctoral degrees through our System now than ever before.

Our public universities are the most affordable in New England. Mainers pay about 40% less to be Black Bears than students in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont spend to attend their own state's flagship.

And we have a much better men's hockey team.

More than half of our System's students qualify for need-based federal Pell grants, and nearly all of them receive thousands of dollars in financial assistance they do not need to pay back. After this generous aid, in-state undergraduates are paying \$9,635 on average to attend UMaine this year, including tuition, fees, room and board. And they'll earn more than double Maine's average median income when they graduate.

In 2017, the University of Maine at Presque Isle launched the state's first "free college" program. Now ALL of our universities offer some form of free tuition program focused on Maine students with financial need and not directly subsidized by the State.

Last year, 30% of all Maine undergraduates — more than 4,000 students — paid nothing out-of-pocket to attend Maine's public universities.

Another way we are reducing costs for Maine families is by allowing more students to take courses through our public universities while they are still in high school — for credit and for free. This year, more than 6,000 high school students are raising their aspirations and reducing their time to a degree and the Maine workforce through UMS Early College. More State funding is necessary to keep pace with this unprecedented demand.

Graduation rates for rural students who enroll in early college and then our public universities are 12 percentage points higher than for their peers. Take Washington County's Bayleigh Alley. She earned two semesters of UMS credit while at Jonesport-Beals High School. She secured a first-grade teaching position at Milbridge Elementary before she even graduated as the University of Maine at Machias' 2024 valedictorian after completing her bachelor's degree in just three years.

Early college students have proven their postsecondary readiness, so why not automatically admit them?

Now we do. Last year, our System began directly admitting Maine high school seniors based on their early college success.

UMaine Cooperative Extension 4-H is the state's largest and most successful youth development program, serving 30,000 Mainers annually. With their strong leadership and STEM skills and a record of hard work and personal responsibility, we think 4H-ers are a great fit for our public universities.

That's why I am pleased to announce that starting this spring, our System will begin also offering direct admissions to promising 4-H students nearing high school graduation, including those who have successfully completed our club, camp, and teen mentorship programs.

But our System cannot survive solely on students coming to us directly from Maine high schools.

A decade ago, billboards across New England began boasting that students could come to our flagship for the price of theirs.

Since the start of Flagship Match, our System's out-of-state enrollment has exploded nearly 60%. We're Maine's largest talent magnet. A brain gain, if you will. This year, we recruited more than 10,000 students here, and a recent UMaine study shows that more than one-third will be retained in the state to live and work after they graduate.

It's estimated that 190,000 Mainers have some college but no door-opening degree or credential. Our public universities are helping them — and the state's employers and economy — realize their full potential.

This includes through the University of Maine at Presque Isle's competency-based YourPace program, which is entirely online. YourPace allows busy working adults to access their courses any time and advance as they master the material. Students receive credit for prior learning and work experience, and pay an affordable flat rate per session, regardless of how many courses they take toward their in-demand degree or certificate in fields like accounting, business, criminal justice, and supply chain management.

YourPace has put Maine on the world map for e-learning leadership and tripled UMPI's enrollment in just five years. Congratulations to the visionary President Ray Rice, his innovative faculty, and my own Chief of Staff, Carolyn Dorsey, who helped to develop this dynamic program so our System could better meet the market.

YourPace is a game-changer for working adults. So are the nearly 200 other high-quality, fully online programs now offered through our System. And we have plans to double that by 2028.

The days of an institution dictating to the population how they will be educated are over.

So, too, are the days of Maine's public universities competing with one another.

Leveraging our first-in-the-nation unified accreditation, we're embracing efficiencies and sharing programs and services. And we're making sure that a student at any UMS university can access the academic offerings and resources of every UMS university.

Instead of creating separate nursing programs, under the leadership of President Cushman, the University of Maine at Augusta has brought its bachelor's in nursing to our institutions in Farmington and Machias, improving local workforce opportunities and healthcare access and outcomes. And faculty at every UMS university are working together to prepare students for careers in Maine's largest economic sector through a System-wide Tourism, Hospitality and Outdoor Recreation Institute, known as THOR.

I want to thank our nearly 13,000 faculty, staff, and student workers for their dedicated public service and commitment to collaboration, and the truly extraordinary team of Presidents who lead them.

For decades, policymakers and the public have been frustrated by the lack of collaboration between the state's public universities and community colleges. In 2015, you actually passed a law just to mandate that the leaders of our two systems meet.

Now, I think the only people who see Dave Daigler more than I do are his wife — and the Appropriations Committee.

Last summer, Dave and I signed Transfer ME, a historic agreement guaranteeing community college graduates automatic admission to Maine's public universities. No applications or fees. No tracking down transcripts or test scores. And no credit loss.

When community college students are halfway to their associate degree, MCCS will notify them about opportunities to continue their postsecondary education and upward mobility at our public universities. And the two systems will provide coordinated advising to any student interested in transferring.

Thank you, Dave, for your partnership. By working together and with Maine Maritime, private colleges, and K-12 schools, our systems are breaking down barriers and Maine's workforce will be the beneficiary.

But it is not enough to get more students through our public universities' doors. We must support their success. And we are.

More than 40% of our students are the first in their families to go to college. And they are twice as likely to graduate as first-generation students do nationally.

Led by UMaine's record retention, the System realized its highest-ever return rate this fall.

Our improving retention and degree completion is a result of relentless focus on student outcomes. Under the leadership of Presidents Edmondson and McDonnell, gains have been greatest at the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine at Farmington.

And we've had some help.

In 2020, the Harold Alfond Foundation announced it would invest \$320 million to strengthen our System's capacity to meet Maine's most pressing workforce and economic needs. And they challenged us to raise nearly \$200 million in matching funds, which can come from new State appropriations.

We call their commitment UMS TRANSFORMS, because that's what it is making possible.

With these funds, we are doubling our output of engineering and computing professionals, and integrating graduate business, law, health, and public policy as employers expect. We're also modernizing the athletic facilities of the state's only NCAA Division I program.

And we're transforming student learning and success, including through hands-on research their first year of college, redesign of gateway STEM courses, and expanded peer tutoring and pathways to Maine careers through paid internships and experiential learning.

Greg Powell, a graduate of the University of Maine School of Law, leads the Harold Alfond Foundation. During Greg's tenure, the Foundation has also made transformative

investments in other Maine institutions, like the community colleges. And it has put a half a billion dollar down payment on the future of Maine through scholarships for every baby born in this state.

I want to recognize the Foundation today, and especially Greg, who is here as my guest. Harold Alfond was the best of Maine. Today, under your leadership, his legacy is helping countless Mainers and our state be their best, too.

Thank you, Greg.

Last year, the Foundation's investment helped our law school relocate to our new Maine Graduate and Professional Center in downtown Portland.

When I became Chancellor in 2019, the University of Maine School of Law was on the verge of closing. We could not let that happen. And we didn't.

Today, Maine's only and public law school is thriving under the leadership of President Leigh Saufley, the state's former Chief Justice and my good friend.

Maine Law is currently experiencing its highest enrollment in more than a decade. About half of its students come from outside of Maine, yet 80% stay in the state to practice after graduation. Their debt load is the lowest of their New England peers, and their first-time bar passage rate is nearly 90%, the highest among New England peers.

Applications to join Maine Law this fall are up 65% over last year.

While headquartered in downtown Portland close to courts and commerce, Maine Law has become a law school — and a force for good — for all of Maine.

This includes Aroostook County, where in 2023 with the support of Maine Attorney General Frey, the Legislature, and Governor Mills, the law school launched a Rural Practice Clinic. Thanks to the hospitality of President Hedeon, the clinic's office is housed at the University of Maine at Fort Kent, as are its student attorneys. Already they have represented more than 100 clients in civil and criminal proceedings, many who otherwise would have lacked that access to justice.

The St. John Valley is a world away from suburban Boston, where Dan Gawrys grew up and earned his undergraduate degree from a public university system not nearly as affordable as ours. He chose Maine Law for its close-knit community, low-cost, high-quality, and access to the mountains.

Through his experiences in Maine Law's rural fellowship program and at the Fort Kent clinic where he is serving this semester, Dan has fallen in love with Aroostook County.

"I love the small-town values. That people take care of one another, their work ethic, and their character. Even as a student attorney, you really feel like you are part of a community here," he says. "You really feel like you are making a difference."

When he graduates next year, he plans to join Swanson Law in Presque Isle, a small firm started and fully staffed by Maine Law alumni. Perhaps you could put in a good word for him, Senator Stewart.

Dan, we are proud that our System brought you to this state and that you in turn have made a lifelong commitment to The County. Will you please stand.

Through our clinics, student attorneys like Dan provided 17,000 hours of pro bono legal aid to low-income people last year.

Like the law school, all of our public universities have a statewide impact. But only one has had a statewide responsibility from its establishment 160 years ago as Maine's land grant.

Today, our flagship, led by the remarkable Joan Ferrini-Mundy, is still the state's land grant. And thanks to a groundswell of support and Senator Susan Collins, it is still Maine's sea grant.

It is also officially one of our nation's top research universities.

The affirmation last month of the University of Maine's well-deserved R1 designation should be a point of pride for us all. Every Mainer benefits from having this world-class research university right in our own backyard.

You've likely fed your family a UMaine-made Caribou Russet, which is now the state's top seed potato; had a smoother ride to the State House over the bridges built with our cutting-edge composite technology; or sent a tick to us for testing. Last year, that UMaine Cooperative Extension diagnostic and research lab, which is managed by Representative Jim Dill, received nearly 5,000 ticks samples, more than half of which tested positive for at least one pathogen like Lyme.

UMaine research and innovation activities span our vast state and the varied needs of its citizens, companies, and communities. And they power Maine's economy.

Flagship researchers have helped the state's iconic wild blueberry industry increase production by 500%. They've patented ballistic panels that protect our nation's military and technology that could assist in the early detection of breast cancer. And when many of our mills closed, they reimagined what could be made from Maine's abundant wood supply, including 3D-printed houses and boats, insulation and other innovative building materials, sustainable packaging, PFAS-free firefighting biogel, and even bone material for orthopedics.

As UMaine R&D demonstrates, our System delivers solutions for our state, and well beyond.

And perhaps there is no problem more pressing than the need to grow the size and skill of our workforce. Here again, the University of Maine System is leading the way.

Just in the last decade, we have conferred more than 53,000 degrees, led by those for business, education, health care, and engineering and computing — fields where Maine most needs more knowledgeable and skilled professionals.

Our public universities produce the most and the best-prepared business leaders and entrepreneurs, educators, engineers, cybersecurity and computing professionals, dental hygienists and assistants, nurses, lawyers, scientists, social workers, and public servants — including about one-third of this Legislature.

We are especially proud that since 2015, eight of Maine's top teachers have been our alumni. This includes the 2025 Maine Teacher of the Year Becky Hallowell, who is a graduate of the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Southern Maine.

Like Mrs. Mitchell did for me in fourth grade, Becky meets her Wiscasset Elementary School fourth-grade students right where they are. She makes each of them feel truly special, as they are. And through engaging nature-based education on the banks of the Sheepscot River, she gets them excited about their learning and their future possibilities.

I know Becky prefers to be outside with her students. I am so honored she's come inside today so this Joint Convention can recognize the contributions she and all Maine public educators — including our own UMS faculty — make.

Becky, please rise and accept our appreciation and congratulations.

Our System's impact on those just getting started in their careers, like law student Dan Gawrys, and those at the height of theirs, like Teacher of the Year Becky Hallowell, is only possible because of ongoing investment from the Legislature and tuition and taxpayers.

Thank you.

We need your help to maintain our momentum for Maine.

Just like the Legislature, we are making tough choices. We've initiated a System-wide hiring freeze, incentivized early faculty retirement, laid off employees, left hundreds of positions vacant, and are selling underutilized properties no longer essential to our mission.

In recognition of these difficult decisions, S&P recently affirmed our System's credit strong rating, noting our "prudent financial management policies" and that "senior leadership has made progress in rightsizing operations."

S&P also concluded that "continued, growing support from the State for operating and capital needs is imperative to the System's long-term success."

As Maine's largest driver of educational attainment and economic development, our System's success is the state's success.

I call on you to sustain the level of funding for UMS proposed in the Governor's biennial budget and recently endorsed by a bipartisan majority of the Education Committee. Your doing so is critical to our ability to maintain student access and achievement, and to mitigate the impacts of compensation and inflationary increases on tuition-payers. I also ask that you not impose unfunded mandates on our public institutions or reduce our ability to responsibly raise revenue.

Second, while our System faces considerable uncertainty right now, nothing keeps me awake at night more than the state of our physical plant.

Decades of underfunding and our commitment to student affordability have burdened Maine's public universities with \$1.6 billion in deferred maintenance. More than half of our facilities and three-quarters of our residence halls have not been meaningfully renovated in at least 50 years. And we have 500,000 square feet of obsolete space ready for removal as soon as demolition resources become available. The condition of

our campuses is a crisis. It challenges recruitment, retention, and our ability to deliver 21st-century education and research-driven innovation, let alone meet basic health and life safety standards.

The Legislature must take this very seriously and soon, whether by supporting a one-time bond or ongoing appropriations for capital improvements or debt service.

Just like roads and bridges, our universities' classrooms and research laboratories are public infrastructure essential to the mobility of Maine people and our economy.

Finally, what you say in these chambers, in your communities, and on your social media channels about public higher education and research really matters. Nearly half of Maine high school graduates do not go onto postsecondary education. Of the students who do, one-third go out of state to study. Too few of them return. And too many Mainers don't realize the world-class educational, economic, and enrichment opportunities available to them through our public universities.

Whether in your role as a policymaker or a parent or peer, please promote Maine's public universities because they are accessible and affordable, and because they are excellent.

I look forward to welcoming even more of your constituents to our campuses and to partnering with you to foster greater prosperity for Maine and all of its people.

Thank you.