

February 4, 2005

Dear Representative

I am writing on behalf of the Associated COLT Staff of the Universities of Maine (ACSUM) regarding the University of Maine's flawed reorganization process and to ask you to co-sponsor a bill introduced by Senator Libby Mitchell to address the flawed process.

ACSUM represents modestly paid UMS clerical staff, of which many are current students or alumni of the University System. For ACSUM, the future of public higher education in Maine is much more than a matter of paycheck protection. UMS clerical employees consider an affordable, accessible system of public higher education of primary importance because it is such an important resource to us, our families and friends, and citizens of Maine.

Trustees of the University of Maine System (UMS) appear intent on implementing a flawed strategic plan that was developed in secret and is now being pursued in spite of opposition by UMS faculty, professional, and support staff. The UMS Strategic Plan promises to save money by incorporating low-cost branches into campuses much more expensive to run; to improve quality by spending less; to strengthen academic programs by shifting resources from the campuses to the Chancellor's office; to eliminate programs and downsize campuses without decreasing access to higher education.

ACSUM membership is not convinced. We pay the bills, keep records, and perform the countless administrative tasks that keep campuses going. We have been on the front lines of efforts to use computers and other new technologies to improve services by working smarter. We can tell tough but achievable goals from over-inflated hype.

Worst of all, the Trustees' plan denies deserving, non-traditional students, many of them poor and female, the opportunity for higher education by eliminating two-year programs when the University of Maine Augusta and University Campus in Bangor are completely overhauled. The theory that these two-year students can be handed over to the Community Colleges without adequate planning fails to recognize the lack of programs, space, and resources that currently exist within those institutions.

The Maine legislature created the University of Maine System in the 1960's to make public higher education opportunities more accessible to Maine citizens. ACSUM believes current UMS efforts to reorganize will ironically recreate the same condition of limited access to educational opportunities.

To slow down the process, Senator Libby Mitchell is introducing legislation that would provide for a public review and evaluation of the Trustees' plan. ACSUM is in support of Senator Mitchell's bill and urges you to halt the reorganization so that students, faculty, staff and community leaders have the chance to build a shared vision for Maine's system of higher education. That vision would provide for a wise use of state funds while preserving student access and affordability.

Sincerely,

Loraine Lowell
ACSUM President