Statement on a Possible Name Change from the USM Alumni Association Board:

On Thursday, March 21, the USM Alumni Association Board met in a special session to consider the proposed name change from University of Southern Maine to University of Maine at Portland. After much discussion and careful deliberation over two meetings, the Board voted 10-1 in support of the name change.

During the Alumni Board’s regular meeting held on Thursday, March 14, USM President Glenn Cummings presented the results of an extensive market research study and the rationale for making the name change. President Cummings reported that between 2014 and 2026, elementary and secondary education school population in Maine will drop more than 12%, the third highest loss in the nation behind New Hampshire and Connecticut. Such a drop in potential students translates to lower enrollments and tuition revenue, which in turn means less money for student aid and scholarships, new staff and programs, and upgrades to all three campuses. In order to continue the strength, quality and affordability of the educational opportunities at USM we will need to attract students from outside of the State of Maine.

Survey data from around New England and New York State conducted by Market Decisions concluded that USM is not well known outside of the State of Maine among prospective students and parents. Most also had no idea that one of its three campuses is located in one of most appealing and opportunity laden small cities in America. The market research concluded that a name change to the University of Maine at Portland would significantly increase interest and understanding of prospective students outside of Maine.

President Cummings also related that the name change, which would need the approval of the University of Maine Board of Trustees and the Maine State Legislature, would likely need to coincide with the construction of a new Portland campus residence hall now in its planning stages.

Over the next 15 years, Maine’s prime working age population of adults aged 25–64 is predicted to shrink 15% from over 700,000 to 600,000. According to the Declaration of Strategic Priorities Plan of the University of Maine System, Maine’s workforce is also experiencing a growing skills gap. In the years ahead, nearly two-thirds of new jobs will require a post-secondary credential or degree in existing and emerging fields.

As a public university, USM has a role in educating tomorrow’s workforce and leaders. This effort of USM to attract out of state students will be critical to sustaining and growing the Maine economy, as 70% of college graduates tend to live within 70 miles of the college that they graduated from.

It is for these reasons that the University of Southern Maine Alumni Board has voted to support changing USM’s name to the University of Maine at Portland. We furthermore encourage USM alumni, the University of Maine Board of Trustees, and the Maine Legislature to support this effort.

Jeffrey Jordan, Alumni Board Chair
Kate Beever, Alumni Board Vice Chair

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