



Department of the Secretary of State

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

TESTIMONY OF SHENNA BELLOWES, MAINE SECRETARY OF STATE and KATE MCBRIEN, MAINE STATE ARCHIVIST

Testifying in Favor

L.D. 1948, "An Act to Amend the State's Data Governance Program"

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government; we are Shenna Bellows, Maine's Secretary of State, and Kate McBrien, Maine's State Archivist. Both the Department of Secretary of State and the Maine State Archives, which falls under the Department's jurisdiction, share support for LD 1948 "An Act to Amend the State's Data Governance Program." As key partners in the State's data governance initiative, we believe the activities laid out in this bill are crucial to developing a lasting and impactful data governance program.

Over the past year, staff in the Maine Secretary of State Department met with numerous state agencies to better understand the state of their data gathering, use, and retention. Through these conversations we found that agencies within the State of Maine Government vary widely in their standardization of data, where they get it and how they use it. Some agencies can share data while other agencies are restricted by either state or federal law. Many agencies collect similar data points, such as age, race, or location, but few collect it using the same structure making it challenging to compare or share data. Lastly, we learned that only a few agencies have created and enacted their own data governance policies while some are now beginning this process independently.

These conversations have been useful to help us understand the current state of data governance and data management. But this year's work is only a start, with much more in depth exploration and understanding needed. That is why a complete data inventory will help our collaborative working group to draft a data governance policy. The Chief Data Officer, working collaboratively with the Secretary of State Department and the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Communities, will set standards and consistent definitions for the data collected. These standards will serve as a foundation for a greater data governance policy. And to implement it all, we need to engage in thoughtful information gathering and education of each state agency collecting or using data.

The requirement for each department to appoint a staff person in charge of meeting data governance policies is similar to the system used for records management by the Maine State Archives. According to Title 5, §95-C, each department or agency head is required to name a records officer, to meet records retention schedules within their own agency and work directly with the Maine State Archives for those records needs. We can do the same for data governance. It is a successful model and one already established and well understood by all departments.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the bill's sponsor for inclusion of the important role records retention schedules play in good data governance. Data is most useful when it is gathered over time. By comparing data points from over the years, we can measure the growth or lack of success of a program or policy. If that data is not thoughtfully retained, it is no longer accessible and useful. The State Archivist's role in this process to ensure retention and preservation of the State's varied data is crucial to making your work impactful over time.

Data becomes information, captured within the permanent records of the State of Maine. Good, reliable data is what our state government needs to both create good policy and measure the success of that policy. The most efficient and effective way to ensure we have that data is through the creation of a data governance policy and a departmental expectation of participation. This bill lays out the pathway to make that possible. The Maine Secretary of State is committed to this important work and ask that you vote ought to pass.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have.