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Senator, District 32

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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Augusta, Maine 04333

Representative Pluecker and Esteemed Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry committee. I'm Senator Henry Ingwersen, and I represent District 32, which includes the York County municipalities of Arundel, Biddeford, Dayton, Hollis, and Lyman. I'm before you today to introduce and speak in favor of my bill LD 315, "An Act to Provide Funding for Drought Relief and Other Programs Benefiting Maine Farmers"

Maine has abundant water resources, but not necessarily enough in the right place or at the right time. In addition, Maine's changing climate is making water availability more unpredictable. Of Maine's four most recent droughts, three of them have occurred in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Many agricultural commodities experienced significant drought in 2020, with dry conditions beginning in mid-May, but rapidly worsening in June. The 2020 rainfall deficit, which was extreme in northern Maine, resulted in occasional record low stream flows, with some farmers futilely attempting to save their crops through excessive water withdrawals from streams and rivers. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) received over 100 citizen complaints related to farm water withdrawal, which included fish kills, low stream flows, destruction of beaver dams, filling of wetlands, and other issues. In March 2021, river flows were already below normal, and some areas of the state received inadequate rainfall until July.

It has been well documented that these weather extremes will continue. The University of Maine's *2020 Maine Drought and Agriculture Report* indicates that climate change is leading to changes in temperature and precipitation, and that climate scientists anticipate that these changes will intensify in coming decades. Suffice to say, Maine farmers face a very uncertain future when it comes to sufficient water for crops.

Because of this, the 130th Legislature passed LD 1998, "An Act to Establish a Fund for Farmers Adversely Affected by Drought Conditions." The bill established two major goals. One was to establish a Drought Relief Grant Program, which the Mills Administration has requested \$2 million for in the upcoming biennial budget, and \$300,000 per year thereafter. The second part of LD 1998 was for the DACF, the DEP, and the LUPC to submit a report with findings and recommendations for streamlining permitting new sources of water for irrigation in Maine. This report, titled *Findings and Recommendations for Streamlining Permitting New Sources of Water for Irrigation in Maine*, was submitted to the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee in January. If passed, LD 315 will implement these recommendations.

To summarize, this bill will provide a one-time appropriation in FY 2024 in order for the Land Use Planning Commission to hire a consultant to review and overhaul the current applications to improve water withdrawal permitting. The bill also establishes and provides ongoing funding for 3 full-time, permanent positions: one within the Land Use Planning Commission; one within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources' Division of Agricultural Resource Development; and one within the Department of Environmental Protection's Water Withdrawal Program.

The detailed additions to the original bill language are attached. I'm happy to take your questions and hope those that follow this testimony will have expertise to answer your questions as well.