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Testimony of Senator Jill Duson supporting LD 1274, “An Act to Increase Land Access for Historically Disadvantaged Populations”

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

April 3, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and Distinguished Colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Jill Duson. I represent Senate District 27, which includes parts of Westbrook and Portland. I am here to speak in favor of LD 1274, “An Act to Increase Land Access for Historically Disadvantaged Populations.”

Access to landownership is not equal. Historically, the Black community has been boxed out of access to landownership and bank loans. For Black farmers, their access has been even more limited.

Since the first white settlers landed on the shores of the Americas, Indigenous communities have been driven from their land through forced removal. Landownership was a defining characteristic of wealth and power. Those who did not own land were at an inherent disadvantage. Gatekeeping Black and Indigenous people from owning land was a way of perpetuating systemic racism.

This legislation will directly address this chronic issue by providing an equitable funding and apprenticeship program specifically for Black and Indigenous farmers. By offering a direct pathway to landownership, we would be continuing our ongoing efforts to combat systemic racism.

Thank you for your time and consideration.