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Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine
Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
132nd Maine Legislature

Re: LD 210 – Support for Increased Funding for the Office of Chief Medical Examiner

Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Peter Cummings, currently of Bangor, Maine. I attended John Bapst Memorial High School and the University of Maine in Orono, and as such, this state holds deep personal significance for me. After graduating from UMaine, I earned a Master's Degree in Pathology from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where I worked as a death scene investigator. I was also part of the team involved in the identification of victims from Swissair Flight 111 in 1998. Following this, I earned my medical degree from the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, Ireland, where I spent considerable time in the medical examiner offices of Belfast and Dublin. During medical school, I also assisted in the identification of remains from the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center.

After medical school, I completed my pathology residency and neuropathology fellowship at the University of Virginia, where I worked for years as a district medical examiner and conducted extensive forensic neuropathology work for the Virginia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. I later completed a forensic pathology fellowship sponsored by Harvard at the Boston Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, where I served as a staff pathologist and Director of Forensic Neuropathology. I went on to establish my own forensic consulting firm while also serving as a Professor of Anatomy and Neurobiology at the Boston University School of Medicine, where I taught forensic science, forensic pathology, forensic anthropology, and the use of science as evidence in the courtroom.

Throughout my career, I have been qualified as an expert in forensic pathology in 27 states and seven countries. I am also the only non-government-appointed forensic pathologist granted access to the National Archives by the Kennedy family to review the original autopsy material pertaining to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. I provide this background not as an exercise in self-promotion but to demonstrate that my

global experience in death investigation systems allows me to recognize what a top-tier medical examiner's office should look like.

It is with this experience that I offer my full support for the budget request presented by Dr. Alice Briones, Chief Medical Examiner of Maine.

The Need for a Top-Tier Medical Examiner's Office

Maine's Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is a cornerstone of public health, criminal justice, and public safety. Yet, despite a doubling in cases investigations since 2014, staffing levels have remained unchanged. Without additional funding, the OCME cannot sustain the standards necessary for accurate, timely, and high-quality forensic investigations—and that has real-life consequences for Maine's citizens.

To ensure that Maine not only meets but sets the national standard for forensic pathology, the OCME must have the resources to meet its growing responsibilities. The following budget initiatives are critical:

1. Acquisition of a Lodox X-ray Machine – This state-of-the-art imaging system will increase efficiency, reduce staff exposure to radiation, and improve forensic investigations by allowing for rapid, full-body imaging.
2. Competitive Compensation for Field Medical Examiners and Investigators – Retaining qualified professionals is essential to ensuring high-quality forensic investigations across the state, especially given Maine's large geographic area.
3. Increased Funding for Toxicology Testing – Comprehensive toxicology analysis is critical in determining causes of death, identifying emerging drug threats, and informing public health policies.
4. Expansion of Staffing – The addition of intake personnel, death investigators, and medical examiner assistants will allow for more autopsies, faster turnaround times, and reduced burnout among current staff.
5. Infrastructure and Operational Support – Proper body storage, IT services, and operational upgrades will enable the OCME to handle increasing caseloads and improve efficiency.

A Fully Funded OCME is an Investment in Public Safety

The OCME is not just an agency that determines how people die—it is a frontline defender of public safety and public health.

When a child dies suddenly, the OCME provides grieving parents with the critical answers they need, whether the cause is an undiagnosed medical condition, an environmental hazard, or an unsafe sleep practice—answers that can prevent another family from suffering the same heartbreak.

When an elderly resident in a care facility dies under suspicious circumstances, it is the OCME that determines whether neglect or abuse played a role, protecting Maine's most vulnerable citizens and holding institutions accountable.

When a young person overdoses, it is the OCME's toxicology findings that identify a deadly new synthetic drug—giving law enforcement, public health officials, and lawmakers the real-time data they need to act swiftly and save lives.

Each case the OCME handles is more than an autopsy—it is an opportunity to prevent future deaths. Without adequate funding, case backlogs grow, investigations slow, and the critical public health insights that could prevent the next crisis go unrecognized until it is too late.

A fully funded OCME ensures:

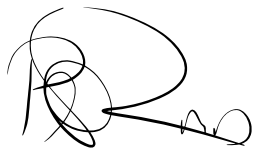
- 1. Families receive closure in the wake of tragedy.**
- 2. Law enforcement has the evidence needed to ensure fair and just investigations and trials.**
- 3. Public health officials can track and respond to emerging threats before they become full-blown crises.**

Under the leadership of Dr. Briones, Maine has the opportunity to set a national example for forensic pathology, proving that the OCME is not merely a place where deaths are examined, but a beacon of scientific excellence, public safety, and justice. By ensuring that investigations are conducted with the highest level of accuracy, integrity, and scientific rigor, we are not only honoring those who have died—we are protecting the living.

I urge you to approve the full budget request of \$1,932,103 to modernize, expand, and strengthen the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. This investment will ensure that Maine has a world-class forensic pathology system—one that not only meets current demands but sets the gold standard for other states to follow. As we used to say when I was growing up: “So goes Maine, so goes the nation.”

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to provide further insight or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Peter Cummings', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr. Peter Cummings