

## **Testimony in Support of LD 1336, An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council**

Eliza Carter, eliza.carter1996@gmail.com

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

My name is Eliza Carter, and I am a resident of Camden, Maine. **I am writing in strong support of LD 1336, An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council.**

This legislation is deeply personal to me and my family. Growing up in rural Maine, we had few opportunities to engage with people from other cultures. That changed when we had the incredible privilege of hosting Japanese exchange students from Aomori two years in a row through the sister-state program. Even though our local school was not sending students to Japan at the time, the experience of welcoming those students into our home opened our eyes and hearts. We learned about their traditions, their daily lives, and their perspectives. What started as a brief visit became a lasting bond — we remained pen pals for years after, continuing to share stories and learn from one another.

When my younger brother reached 8th grade, the program resumed at our school, and he was able to travel to Aomori himself. That journey was transformative for him — it sparked a lifelong interest in learning about the world beyond our borders and laid the foundation for his curiosity and personal growth.

More recently, my mom and sister had the opportunity to visit Aomori, where they connected even more deeply with the culture through my sister's partner's family, who are from the region. Their experience reaffirmed what we already knew: the Maine-Aomori connection is not just about travel — it's about deep, meaningful relationships that promote mutual understanding.

Our family's story is just one example of how this sister-state relationship fosters cultural exchange, curiosity, and empathy. These experiences have shaped our lives and our worldview, and I know countless other Maine families have been touched in similar ways.

Establishing the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council in statute will ensure this vital connection continues to thrive for future generations. It is a powerful reminder that even in small, rural communities like ours, we are part of a much larger global community — and there is so much we can learn from one another.

I urge you to support LD 1336 so that this meaningful relationship between Maine and Aomori can continue to grow, enrich lives, and promote global understanding. Thank you for your time and consideration.