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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 1655

An Act to Allow the Keeping of Chickens on Private Residential Property

April 24, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Megan Patterson. I am the Director of the Division of Animal and Plant Health. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) neither for nor against LD 1655, *An Act to Allow the Keeping of Chickens on Private Residential Property*.

The Department appreciates the intent of LD 1655, which appears to be designed to create a baseline in the standards that apply to the non-commercial raising of chickens on residential property. The Department is committed to upholding best management practices (BMPs) that support the humane and healthful rearing of livestock. DACF offers the following guidance in our *Manual of Best Management Practices for Maine Agriculture*:

- Utilize appropriate housing for optimal productivity and health of various species
- Utilize appropriate containment structures in terms of capacity, siting, and construction method for personnel safety and environmental protection
- Provide appropriate facilities and environment for optimal livestock productivity and health
- Construct species-specific fencing for livestock and predator control and for environmental protection
- Locate new manure storage structures as far as practical from neighboring residences (the Department has specific guidelines for spreading and stacking manure)
- Keep all animal and barnyard areas as clean and dry as possible to minimize insect breeding sites
- Clean up spilled feed and spoil piles as soon as possible
- Properly dispose of animal carcasses immediately upon discovery

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DACF BMPs do not specifically address the number of chickens allowed in an area beyond what is perceived as reasonably comfortable or beneficial to the animal. However, the remainder of LD 1655's identified requirements do align with many of the factors that DACF staff consider when reviewing a livestock operation in response to a complaint under the Maine Agricultural Protection Act (7 MRS § 151 et seq.).

Still, at least two issues exist with this bill:

- Several municipalities have enacted chicken ordinances. Some of these are more restrictive than LD 1655. These ordinances typically emerge from concerns about the potential attraction of vermin, the crowing of roosters, and odors being perceptible beyond property boundaries. These ordinances often address maximum numbers of chickens, criteria for feed/manure handling and storage, and housing construction. Efforts should be made to identify how LD 1655 will impact these existing ordinances, if at all.
- Absent the inclusion of a directive to rotate outdoor runs, it is unclear what is accomplished by providing ten square feet of outdoor space. Absent rotation, chickens typically turn an area into bare soil quickly.

Thank you for your time. I would happily answer any questions now or at the work session.