PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF LD 1677

May 2, 2025

An Act to Establish the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Prevention and Support Program

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Gareth Howell. I am a professor and scientist at The Jackson Laboratory and a resident of Mt. Desert. I am pleased to testify in **support** of LD 1677, an act that will establish the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) Prevention and Support Program, to coordinate the Maine ADRD community around a shared goal of supporting individuals with ADRD diagnoses, their families and caregivers.

The terrible impact of this disease is well known to this committee. I'm certain that most of us have direct experience with Alzheimer's disease. Collectively, it's these personal experiences, in addition to the growing public health impact, that underscore our support of this legislation.

The Jackson Laboratory (JAX) is an independent, nonprofit, biomedical research institution headquartered in Bar Harbor, with a major campus in Ellsworth, and facilities in Augusta and Portland. The JAX mission is to discover precise genomic solutions to disease and empower the global biomedical community in the shared quest to improve human health. This mission is critically important to the State of Maine, where some of the leading causes of death—including Alzheimer's disease—are diseases where the incidence, treatment and outcome of the illness is significantly based in personal genetics.

JAX, through work done in my lab and the labs of my colleagues, is focused on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias along three interrelated fronts. First, the JAX Center for Alzheimer's and Dementia Research investigates the origins, progression and treatments of AD using the mouse as a model organism. The Center leverages external funding from the National Institutes of Health to better understand the genetics and genomics of the disease and the impact of environmental

factors including diet, sleep, and exercise. Second, JAX is one of five institutions in a national consortium to identify genetic variants and biomarkers for AD; to generate the next generation of mouse models of AD; and to develop a preclinical testing pipeline for possible therapeutics. Third, JAX is a center for workforce development through educational programs including summer internships and workshops, and a cooperative Ph.D. program in partnership The University of Maine Graduate School of Biomedical Science and Engineering. In fact, a UMaine GSBSE student in my own lab was co-author of a recent paper studying how retinal degeneration in diverse mouse models might help us better understand neurodegeneration in brain tissue.

For these reasons, JAX supports this bill, including the duties of the proposed Council to recommend policies and strategies designed to increase public awareness, promote brain health and risk reduction strategies, educate health care providers, and increase and improve research on ADRD. Additionally, we are pleased that diverse perspectives are represented on the Council, including from institutions with experience in biomedical research related to ADRD.

In conclusion, The Jackson Laboratory is pleased to support this bill and we recommend the committee vote LD 1677 “ought to pass.”