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In Support of LD 2026: “An Act Regarding Distributions from the Stipend Fund for Agricultural Fair Competitions and Events”

Honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Bill Pluecker, and I represent House District 44, comprising the towns of Warren, Hope and Union.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of this legislation, which addresses a practical challenge facing Maine's agricultural fairs. Currently, stipend distributions only apply to competitions judged during official fair dates. This technical restriction creates real operational problems for fair organizers across our state.

Maine's agricultural fairs are community institutions that celebrate our farming heritage and bring neighbors together. However, the current system forces all judging to occur during the fair itself, when volunteers and staff are stretched thin managing crowds, vendors, and countless activities. This bill would allow judging to begin up to twenty-four hours before official fair dates while still qualifying for stipend distributions.

By spreading judging across additional hours reduces bottlenecks and ensures careful, thorough evaluation of livestock, produce, and crafts. Exhibitors and fairgoers can see winning entries from opening day, enhancing their experience and recognizing participants sooner. And perhaps most importantly, judges can volunteer in other essential capacities during the fair—working gates, assisting with youth programs, or supporting wherever help is needed.

Our agricultural fairs operate on tight budgets and depend heavily on volunteers. This modest change gives fair boards crucial flexibility without additional state expense. The emergency preamble ensures implementation for this year's fair season, when organizers are already finalizing schedules.

I urge this Committee's support for Maine's agricultural fairs and the thousands of volunteers who make them possible. Thank you.

