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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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**Testimony of Senate President Mattie E. Daughtry
In Support of LD 2094, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Support Maine's
Agricultural and Forestry Sectors"**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee: My name is Mattie Daughtry, and I proudly serve as President of the Maine State Senate, representing Senate District 23, which includes Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 2094, a bond proposal that builds on our collective efforts to strengthen Maine's farms, forests, and working lands.

This Committee has been a thoughtful steward of Maine's agricultural and forestry policies for many years, wrestling with how best to support the backbone of our state's economy and the people who make it thrive. Just last session, I brought a similar bond before you because I believe deeply that investing in working lands and the families who steward them is both economically smart and spiritually rooted in who we are as a state. That conviction hasn't changed, it has only grown stronger.

Maine's agricultural and forestry sectors are more than lines on a balance sheet. They are the landscape of our heritage and the lifeblood of many rural communities. Farms put food on Maine tables; forests sustain family livelihoods from the North Woods to the coast; and working lands form the foundation of our local economies and culture. As someone who has farmed throughout my life, whose mother ran a blueberry field when I was young, and as a member of my local farmers' market association, I have seen firsthand how the challenges of today, from volatile weather patterns to rising input costs and limited access to capital, can strain even the most resilient farm and forest enterprises.

That lived experience informs my belief that we must treat agriculture and forestry like infrastructure, not in the abstract, but in practice. When transportation, energy, or housing sectors receive capital investment because they are essential to economic activity, there is broad understanding that the return on that investment ripples through communities. The same is true for agriculture and forestry: when we provide capital to expand processing capacity, improve soil health, protect and access farmland, and strengthen value chains, we are investing in Maine's economic resilience and food system security for decades to come.

The programs that this bond would support are not new nor untested. They are established avenues that farmers, foresters, and food producers already rely on to grow their businesses, weather difficult seasons,

and build markets. Yet in their current states, they are underfunded relative to demand and need, meaning too many Mainers are left waiting for resources that could help them expand operations, adapt to changing climates, or capture new markets. This bond proposal responds directly to that reality by providing the capital infusion necessary to scale these tools and make them effective statewide.

At a time when federal support for agriculture and forestry is fluctuating and local markets continue to evolve, Maine must step forward with a strategy that expands opportunity, protects working lands, and sustains families who choose to make their lives here. Investing in farmland access, infrastructure, value-added production, soil and drought resilience, and dairy and forestry markets isn't about government expansion, it's about supporting the very foundations of our economy and culture.

LD 2094 gives this Legislature, and ultimately the voters of Maine, the chance to affirm that our farms and forests deserve the same strategic capital commitment that we make in our roads, schools, and health systems. I urge you to support this proposal and move it forward so the full Legislature can continue that important conversation.

Thank you for your attention and for the careful work you do on behalf of the people of Maine. I look forward to continued dialogue on this critical investment.