



Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 132nd

Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

January 28, 2026

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am the Policy & Research Director at Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). I am providing testimony on behalf of MFT in support of LD 2144 – *Resolve, to Establish the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Our goals are to keep agricultural lands working and help farmers and their communities thrive. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect farmland in every county in Maine, amounting to over 58,000 acres across 395 farms. Our Farm Network includes more than 550 farms that have participated in MFT's programming either through an agricultural easement or through one of our other areas of work. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, and Policy and Research.

As you can imagine from this description of our main program areas, MFT staff spends a lot of time working with farmers to help them meet their goals – whether those goals are financial, operational, or conservation-focused. And, though we don't offer mental health or wellness support ourselves, the nature of our work puts us in close touch with a broad community of farmers who have made it incredibly clear how profound the need for mental health and wellness support is for them and their fellow farmers *and how far short existing services are falling*. Farmers face high levels of stress as business owners operating within an economic environment in which it's extremely difficult to make a living no matter how hard they work and with many factors impacting their success that are outside of their control (e.g. weather extremes, market fluctuations, input cost increases, development pressure). Further, farmers often 'work from home' in rural communities, which can be an isolating experience for anyone, and in situations where, due to affordability issues, they've had to opt for the most basic of insurance plans that sometimes don't have in-network providers close to their home, they can experience long wait-times and/or inadequate coverage for the sort of support that they need. Lastly, we hear from farmers how difficult it is for them to simply take the time they need (and deserve) to care for their own wellness. Farmers are often working in situations where they can't afford to take time off because they don't have or can't afford staff coverage for the tasks that need to get done or would need to secure extra (costly) childcare coverage to take the time needed for their own wellness. These compounding factors make it extremely difficult for farmers to get the mental health support that they need and necessitate the need for a concerted effort, like the one proposed through LD 2144, to ensure that members of our heritage industries are able to access the wellness and mental health resources to which they have a right.

MFT strongly supports LD 2144 and its creation of a working group to improve access to mental health and wellness care for those involved in the agriculture, fisheries, forestry and logging industries. This group's mandate of reviewing available resources, identifying gaps and barriers in the provision of services, recommending potential funding mechanisms, and exploring educational opportunities to reduce stigma and increase awareness, would go far towards better supporting farmers and other members of our heritage industries. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 2144. We urge you to support this resolve and would be glad to try to answer any questions you may have either now or during the work session.