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**LD 474 – Battery Stewardship Program (Concept Draft Amendment)**

Senator Templer, Representative Doudera, and honorable members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Shawn Esler, and it is a privilege to serve as Maine’s State Fire Marshal. I am offering testimony **neither for nor against** LD 474. We appreciate the intent of the bill and offer comments solely from a fire and life-safety perspective.

Rechargeable and lithium-ion batteries are increasingly associated with fires across the country, particularly in locations where batteries are aggregated: recycling centers, transfer stations, and storage facilities. These fires are uniquely challenging due to thermal runaway and the difficulty of extinguishment once ignition occurs.

Maine has recently implemented the National Emergency Response Information System, or NERIS, which enhances our ability to track emerging fire hazards. As we modernize our reporting, battery-related incidents are becoming more clearly identifiable in national and regional data trends.

LD 474 would significantly expand the number of permanent battery collection sites statewide, including sites that may accept medium-format and damaged batteries. From a public safety standpoint, aggregation of these batteries (particularly damaged or defective units) increases ignition risk if not properly stored, monitored, and coordinated with local responders.

Our primary concern is coordination with Maine’s fire departments.

The bill does not currently require notification to local fire departments when permanent collection sites are established, nor does it explicitly reference compliance with fire and life safety codes adopted under Title 25. As collection infrastructure expands, it is critical that local fire departments are aware of these locations, understand the type and volume of materials stored, and can incorporate them into pre-incident planning. If this bill moves forward, we respectfully recommend that it includes clear language requiring compliance with adopted fire codes and coordination with local fire departments for permanent collection sites.

Early coordination between program operators and fire departments will ensure this program strengthens safety rather than unintentionally increasing hazard. Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to public safety, we stand ready to assist the committee as needed.

Shawn Esler, State Fire Marshal