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Testimony of Representative Victoria Doudera on LD 19, "An Act to Authorize the National Institute of Funeral Service to Grant Associate Degrees"

February 2, 2023

Greetings Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Representative Vicki Doudera, and I represent House District 41, the towns of Camden and Rockport. I'm here today to speak in favor of **LD 19, "An Act to Authorize the National Institute of Funeral Service to Grant Associate Degrees."**

This bill asks that the National Institute of Funeral Service be allowed to receive degree granting authority as a post-secondary institution offering a 64 credit Associate Degree in Applied Science. The bill came to me from a constituent and the first thing I did was reach out to funeral service professionals in my district, all of whom said that having a way for Maine people to receive an associate degree in this field, here in our state, would help them and their industry. With our aging population and workforce shortage, the funeral service industry sorely needs new people going into this profession to meet the ever-growing demand. There is presently no program based in Maine to provide this education, and this bill will make that happen.

Ms. Tracy Lentz, who you will hear from in just a few minutes, is the driving force behind this educational endeavor. You will hear in her testimony how she is diligently working to create a quality program that we will all be proud of. You will hear of her qualifications, as well as those of her partner, Dr. George Connick, and the steps these two very qualified educators have taken for the past two years to make this good idea a reality.

This program is needed. It will be sustainable and will help address the severe shortage of funeral directors here in Maine. It will give students who take the program an entry into a well paying profession that will never be short of new business. But unfortunately, due to some

unforeseen consequences, this program is not 100% ready at this time. It is a complicated process – as well it should be – and we expect to have everything in place for final approval by the end of May.

I respectfully ask that this committee remove the emergency status of this bill, and delay the work session until later in the session so that a few things can be finalized for the Department of Education. Everyone is working diligently but the fact is we just need a few more months.

Thank you,

Rep. Vicki Doudera