



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Good morning Chair Ingerwerson, Chair Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. My name is Katrina Smith and I represent District 62; China, Palermo, Somerville, Windsor and Hibberts Gore. I come before you this morning to present "An Act to Enhance Awareness of Laboratory Testing of Ticks for Lyme Disease".

I present this bill because I believe that Lyme disease is an incredible threat to the people of Maine, to their health, to their economic status, and to the overall well-being of our state. I am certain that each and everyone one of you on this committee has come in contact with Lyme disease in some way whether it is yourself, a family member, or a friend.

In my world I have had both of my teenage sons contract Lyme, fortunately they were diagnosed and treated right away because of the presence of a bullseye and immediate symptoms. However my husband was diagnosed only after presenting with longer-term symptoms, and within a mile of my house I have had one neighbor die and 2 other neighbors become gravely ill because of a tick bite. Lyme disease can have a short-term impact on health and personal economy or it can have a devastating and long-term impact on the lives of the people who experience it.

We are fortunate that the State and Federal government has seen fit to fund the epidemic of Lyme and ongoing research, what I do not feel has been provided for is funding to educate the public on *concrete actions* they can take to identify the disease. This is the reason I am here today...to ask you to fund the University of Maine Cooperative Extension tick lab with the funds to run a comprehensive public awareness campaign that highlights the ability to identify the pathogen a specific tick contains.

Currently for \$15 the Cooperative Extension will conduct a laboratory analysis of a tick sent into their lab and within 72 hours provide the consumer with an emailed report of the pathogens the tick may, or may not, have held. It is an extremely useful tool to guide people in the decisions they need to make regarding their health. Not all people will have the tick that bites them, but for those that do, this is a test that can determine courses of antibiotics, doctor visits, or even emergency care. The tick lab currently has no budget for self-promotion.

I believe it is important to note that Lyme tests that are taken after one has contracted Lyme are notoriously inaccurate and can be taken multiple times and never pop positive for Lyme.

An added benefit to bringing more ticks into the lab is the ability to increase accurate geographical and pathogen data that will help us fight this epidemic. In 2022 a total of 5,274 ticks were submitted to the UMaine Extension Tick Surveillance Program, with samples submitted from each of the state's 16 counties and from 380 towns. 56.5% of the adult ticks and 33% of nymph ticks were positive for at least one pathogen.

I did not have the fiscal note ready for this hearing, but I will present the committee with the fiscal note for the work session which will be a total of \$150,000 as a separate line item to the University, using \$30,000 per year to keep the cost of the test to \$15 and \$45,000 a year to provide for promotion and awareness of the tremendous services of the tick lab.

Thank you for your time and your concern of this ongoing health crisis that Mainers face.