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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

IN SUPPORT OF LD 1227

*An Act To Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands
Conservation*

April 10, 2023

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Nancy McBrady, and I am the Deputy Commissioner of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am speaking in support of LD 1227, *An Act To Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation*.

DACF supports renewable energy development in Maine and understands that solar is a key component of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels. We also support opportunities for farmers to address their own energy needs with renewable sources and to enhance the economic viability of their operations with thoughtful siting of renewable energy infrastructure. To that end, DACF helped steward an Agricultural Solar Siting Stakeholder Group that was convened in 2021 and resulted in a report to this Committee that made several recommendations regarding solar-agriculture policy development. LD 856 last year and now LD 1227 are a direct outgrowth of that stakeholder process.

DACF supports this legislation's creation of a database that tracks renewable energy projects in Maine. Information regarding such projects is currently hard to find and often incomplete. Robust data collection and transparent distribution of information regarding permitted and constructed renewable energy projects are critical. Access to this data will allow a solid understanding of existing (or soon-to-be-developed) solar sites and locations in the state, enabling the calculation of impacts on lands, acreage, and soil type(s) and the assessment of other important trends. A database will also allow stakeholders to ascertain whether there appears to be overdevelopment occurring in certain areas and to consider strategies to avoid that.

DACF also supports pilot program planning to explore the potential for dual-use solar projects in Maine. A pilot program is needed to conduct critical research on compatible crops and livestock

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in Maine to determine viability for farmers interested in pursuing solar energy generation on their land while continuing to farm actively. The results of a well-developed pilot program will be instrumental in demonstrating whether dual-use solar development is viable in Maine and could lead to future policy developments supporting dual-use growth, if so. However, DACF currently lacks sufficient staff and expertise to lead this pilot design effort. We will require a new, full-time staff member to join our team. Without it, DACF will not be successful in meeting this bill's charge.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have now or at the work session.