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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY COMMITTEE**

**An Act to Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands  
Conservation  
L.D. 1227**

**GOVERNOR'S ENERGY OFFICE  
April 10, 2023**

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry: My name is Caroline Colan, and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Governor's Energy Office (GEO).

The GEO testifies in support of L.D. 1227.

As recommended by the Maine Climate Council, an Agricultural Solar Stakeholder Group was established in 2021, co-chaired by GEO Deputy Director, Celina Cunningham, and Deputy Commissioner at DACF, Nancy McBrady. The group focused on assessing the potential impact and benefits of solar development on Maine's prime farmland and soils of statewide importance. The final report advanced seven consensus recommendations to the DACF and GEO, and was released as part of DACF's report pursuant to Resolve 2021 Chapter 26 on January 20, 2022. L.D. 1227 addresses two of those recommendations: to create and maintain a publicly-accessible database of fully permitted and constructed energy projects to identify potential trends, and to explore the establishment of a pilot program for dual-use projects that combine agricultural production with solar energy production.

The GEO recognizes that prime farmland, and soils of statewide importance are important natural resources for Maine's agricultural productivity, biodiversity, and food security. At the same time, solar energy development is key to achieving Maine's renewable energy goals, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and growing Maine's clean energy economy. There are exciting opportunities for solar energy development and agricultural and horticultural lands to not only co-exist, but provide benefits to both the renewable energy development opportunities, land use options, innovative crop treatment, and diverse funding streams for farmers and landowners.

The GEO is supportive of pursuing the opportunity for dual-use solar development in a way that provides greatest benefit to the state and landowners, and believes that DACF, the GEO, the Public Utilities Commission, key stakeholders, and state research institutions are well-positioned to inform the design of a robust, research-driven pilot program. Regarding successful implementation of such a pilot program, however, the GEO would advocate for adequate funding to support the legislation's objectives, and for additional clarification regarding the procurement of projects that would participate in the pilot program, as well for the Commission to remain engaged regarding the negotiation of potential energy contracts to ensure that the pilot is cost effective for Maine ratepayers. In designing the pilot, the feasibility of accomplishing objectives utilizing already deployed solar energy systems with consenting landowners should be evaluated in an effort to minimize program costs.

Finally, the GEO appreciates the direction outlined in this proposed legislation to establish a publicly-accessible database of energy projects that are fully permitted or constructed, as outlined in Sec. 3. This would be a useful tool to identify land use and other energy trends that may help inform decision-making for future policy and program development regarding renewable energy projects. The GEO would like to ensure that adequate funding would be allocated for the development of this database, and anticipates the need for an additional staff member to develop and keep the database up to date, as well as to share the information most effectively with the public and policymakers.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation. If the Committee moves it forward, we are happy to work with the sponsor, engaged agencies and stakeholders.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Colan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Colan, Legislative Liaison  
Governor's Energy Office