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Testimony in favor of LD 1233  
An Act Regarding the Maine State Cemetery Preservation Commission

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Helen Shaw. I live in Rockport. I am chair of the Maine State Cemetery Preservation Commission.

The Maine State Cemetery Preservation Commission was created last session by LD 379 which this Committee voted unanimously as ought to pass. The Commission has been meeting monthly since last fall. As required by statute the Commission has written by-laws and has also written a mission statement.

The Commission was created with no funding. Those of us who worked for years to recommend changes in cemetery statutes and ultimately to propose a state cemetery commission, were a tad naive in thinking a commission could function without funding as all of us were used to working on cemetery preservation as volunteers or as part of our occupation.

We have discovered is we do need money! We need money to set up and maintain a web page. We need money to pay for printing educational material to be sent to municipalities and others involved with cemeteries and burying grounds. We need money to attend conferences and meetings of groups involved with cemeteries and burying grounds to spread the word of our existence and to provide direct educational information on how to preserve and protect cemeteries and burying grounds.

As stated in Section 4 of LD 1233, we want to set up a grant program which would assist with mandated maintenance of veterans' graves in particular. It is hoped that once funds start coming in the grant program would expend to help with all types of maintenance and repairs that are too often far beyond the ability of municipalities and others involved with cemeteries and burying grounds to pay for. The specific form of the program would be part of the report required in Section 4 of LD 1233 to be developed and delivered to, presumably, this Committee by November 6, 2024.

As we take the baby steps outlined in LD 1233; as the Commission and its duties become known to the cemetery community; once funds start to come in; the Commission will most likely find there is a need for an office and an employee.

There are a few minor changes and clarifications to LD 1233 which will be discussed by others presenting testimony here and will be elaborated on at the work session. LD 1233 changes the "may" in our duties to "shall" to emphasize the Commission's authority to act in these areas. It was suggested that paragraph D under duties be separated out and listed as "may" rather than "shall." This is a step towards the future when those involved with cemeteries and burying grounds have been better educated in their preservation and protection