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

IN SUPPORT OF 1682

*An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program*

April 26, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Craig Lapine, and I am Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry in support of LD 1682, *An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program*.

Several aspects of DACF's mission would seem to be supported by the Maine Experiential Education Program. Our Department favors programs that encourage Maine's young people to learn about and consider careers in agriculture and to increase awareness of where food comes from and appreciation for those who grow it. We are also in favor of programs that encourage the consumption of Maine-grown foods by highlighting the diverse, high-quality products that can be produced here, such as in school or community gardens, and by farmers, while also instilling ongoing support for our producers among Maine consumers. By supporting garden-based education in schools and linking that education to the Maine Farm and Sea to School Institute, a program that incentivizes the use of local foods in school meals programs, MEEP appears designed to do all of that and more.

K-12 curriculum and instruction is chiefly the purview of the Department of Education. That said, DACF supports the Maine Ag in the Classroom program that connects us with the work of Maine school districts.

LD 1682 calls for the Department to develop, manage, and evaluate a grant program. We estimate that creating such a program would require staff at the level of a Public Service Coordinator II; funding for staff would need to be attached to legislation establishing the program in order for DACF to fulfill the scope of this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions now or during the work session.

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