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May 1, 2023

**Testimony of Rep. Sally Cluchey presenting LD 1767, *An Act to Develop and Provide Technical Assistance for Meat Slaughtering and Processing*
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture Conservation and Forestry**

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and esteemed members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is Sally Cluchey and I proudly represent House District 52, which includes the communities of Bowdoinham, Bowdoin and Richmond.

I am here today to present LD 1767: An Act to Develop and Provide Technical Assistance for Meat Slaughtering and Processing. I really like food, and I very much enjoy feeding other people. I serve as the chair of the Bowdoinham Food Pantry and when the pandemic hit in March of 2020, I had never been more thankful to live in a town where I was surrounded by farms producing a wide array of fresh produce.

The pandemic drove home how important it is for Mainers to be able to feed ourselves and one another, and not to have to rely on global supply chains. That spring, the Food Pantry fed more people than we'd ever fed before, and each week we were able to provide an abundance of local, fresh organic vegetables, local milk, cheese and butter, and local eggs from happy, free-ranging chickens, ducks, and geese.

What we weren't able to provide as readily was meat. Although we have abundant vegetable farms in Maine, we don't have that same abundance of meat and poultry farms and processing capacity.

When I was elected to the Legislature, the first piece of legislation I wanted to work on was to expand the Hunters for the Hungry Program, which allows hunters to donate wild game to food pantries with the state picking up the cost for the meat processing and packaging. After my first few meetings with the Hunters for the Hungry program director and the Department of IFW, I learned that while that program is quite successful, they really couldn't expand it because there simply aren't enough meat processors in the state. I learned that if we want to expand access to local meat, including wild game, we must increase the number of Maine's meat slaughtering and processing facilities.

That led me to LD 493 from the 130th Legislature, which tried to do just that. Although it received widespread support, it wasn't funded. So, I'm here to try again with LD 1767, which is essentially the recommendations from the report that came out of the LD 493 study.

LD 1767 has three main components:

Section 1 provides funding to the UMaine Cooperative Extension to hire a full time faculty member with expertise in meat and poultry processing, quality control training, hazard analysis critical control point training, and business planning support. This person will provide critical guidance to Mainers looking to start or expand a meat slaughtering and processing business.

Section 2 directs DACF to create an exploratory committee to develop workforce training strategies in collaboration with the Department of Labor, Maine Cooperative Extension, and meat and poultry processors in the state. This committee will provide a report back to the ACF committee, which may report out legislation.

Section 3 provides funding to UMaine to conduct a feasibility study to examine processing and marketing of local meat. The goal of this study is to generate information that will be useful for businesses and investors when they are considering starting a new meat or poultry processing facility or expanding an existing facility. It will give them information about startup costs, regulatory requirements, and marketing considerations. This study is also intended to provide information on additional considerations required for raising and producing halal, kosher, or other religious and culturally important meat products.

I think it's important to really highlight that last piece. When I began learning more about the meat and poultry processing industry, it came to my attention that an increasing number of Mainers do not have access to high quality meat that they're able to consume. As we work to make Maine more self-reliant, it's important that we ensure all Mainers are able to access local, fresh meat.

As you'll see, this bill will come with a fiscal note. In advance of the hearing, I worked with faculty at the UMaine Cooperative Extension to try to provide a realistic estimate of what they believe this work will cost. Dr. Jason Bolton will be testifying by Zoom later this morning, and I suggest saving all technical questions for him. I appreciate your time this morning, and I hope that you will vote to pass LD 1767 and support its funding.