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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY  
IN SUPPORT OF LD 1767

*An Act to Develop and Provide Technical Assistance for Meat Slaughtering and Processing*

May 1, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Celeste Poulin, and I am the Director of the Division of Quality Assurance and Regulation (QAR) at the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am testifying in support of LD 1767, *An Act to Develop and Provide Technical Assistance for Meat Slaughtering and Processing*.

QAR is tasked with implementing both state and federal laws regarding food and food products in commerce. In addition to enforcing basic food sanitation and safety standards, our Consumer Protection Inspectors enforce retail compliance with the Maine Food Code and the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. This includes administering the Maine Meat and Poultry Inspection (MMPI) program. The MMPI program provides daily inspections at six state-inspected facilities. The six facilities inspected daily by the MMPI program represent half of the total inspected red meat slaughter capacity in the state. We also provide annual food safety inspections at 44 custom slaughterhouses, where the meat produced under inspection cannot be sold at retail. We also regulate the 60 poultry producers who receive the exemption available to operations producing fewer than 1,000 birds annually.

The Department knows full well that there is far more demand for inspected livestock slaughter than Maine presently has the capacity to meet. Part of the challenge is infrastructure. The Department's recent Agriculture Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) grants, along with the funding being sought this session for the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund, will support the expansion of critical slaughter and processing infrastructure. However, equally as important is the human component of this industry. Staffing these new and expanded businesses with trained and qualified individuals is critical. Increasing slaughter and processing infrastructure must be supported in tandem with training to attract and retain skilled labor. In addition, the need to thoughtfully and

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thoroughly plan for future slaughter and processing infrastructure expansion cannot be overemphasized. LD 1767 lays out a plan to address these needs.

LD 1767 addresses specific workforce development training in meat and poultry processing by tasking the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (UMCE) with developing relevant curricula. It also directs the Department to form an exploratory committee in conjunction with UMCE and others to look at different models and delivery systems to provide this training effectively and efficiently. We look forward to doing so with our partners. Last, the bill provides for UMCE to conduct a feasibility study that will identify the financial, physical, regulatory, marketing, and cultural barriers to increasing meat and poultry slaughter and processing in the state; and provide financial, regulatory, market, and technical information to guide those establishing or expanding meat and poultry processing facilities. This study will lay the vital groundwork for existing and potential processors to successfully expand or launch in Maine.

The Department is confident that the requirements of LD 1767 will provide the framework and resources necessary to address known gaps in Maine's meat and poultry processing capacity. I am happy to answer any questions and can be available at the work session as needed.