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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

Neither for Nor Against LD 1916

*An Act to Classify Meat and Poultry Products Inspections as Essential Services*

May 15, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Craig Lapine, Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. I am here today to speak neither for nor against LD 1916, "*An Act to Classify Meat and Poultry Products Inspections as Essential Services*."

DACF fully agrees that we need robust meat processing infrastructure and an adequate workforce to meet the demands that Maine farmers and food producers require.

As written, the bill amends the State statute pertaining to emergency proclamations. It would ensure that when the Governor declares a state of emergency, the services provided by the State's meat and poultry inspectors would be treated as essential, and they would provide services during the emergency timeframe.

Currently, Maine governors have broad discretion regarding the shaping and implementation of emergency plans. Nothing prevents governors from declaring the services meat and poultry inspectors provide as essential. In fact, for the emergencies declared for the COVID-19 pandemic, meat and poultry inspections were deemed essential, as were inspections for dairy, potatoes, and other consumer products. The work of all these inspectors continued.

LD 1916 would remove the Governor's discretion regarding meat and poultry inspection and require that they be deemed essential. The only other services provided or regulated by the State named explicitly in this section of statute are health care services and surgeries.

We'd like to note that during previous budget discussions with this committee, members inquired about meat and poultry inspectors being deemed essential during *snowstorms*. A snowstorm is not typically a state of emergency. You may recall that, during those budget discussions, we agreed to work on this issue over the summer as it requires some coordination with the relevant

union That remains our plan, and we hope to have a better assessment of the pros and cons after the legislative session

Thanks for the opportunity to testify I'm happy to answer questions now and at the work session