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**THE MAINE SENATE**  
131st Legislature

**Testimony of Senator Stacey Guerin**  
**Presenting L.D. 1916, An Act to Classify Meat and Poultry Products Inspections as**  
**Essential Services**  
**Before the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee**  
**May 15, 2023**

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pleucker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry I am Senator Stacey Guern and I represent District 4, which includes all of Piscataquis County and 11 communities in Penobscot County I'm pleased to be with you today to present L D 1916, *An Act to Classify Meat and Poultry Products Inspections as Essential Services*

Under the Maine Meat and Poultry Inspection program, daily inspections of small to medium sized livestock and poultry facilities are required According to the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's website, these inspections take place to ensure that "livestock used in the production of meat and poultry products are humanely handled, disease-free not adulterated, and correctly labeled and packaged "

The ability for livestock and poultry facilities to conduct business and make product shipping deadlines is hinged upon these inspections If an inspection does not take place, the facility is unable to do things such as slaughter, package or label product This has a consequential ripple-effect on the business and our citizens who want to purchase locally grown food Available inspections are an important aspect of the local food movement

Unfortunately, since state inspectors are not classified as essential state workers, when the state closes, these businesses and their employees must all but halt their work In the three-month span from December 16, 2022 to March 14, 2023, state offices were closed five days with two additional days resulting in early closures I should note that those days do not represent the holidays, which occurred during that time frame

I am before you today presenting this legislation because constituents of mine, and likely some of yours, have been significantly impacted by these closures Meanwhile, similar facilities that are inspected by the U S Department of Agriculture (USDA) do not experience the same weighty outcomes because their inspectors are essential Even in cases of federal government shutdowns, USDA inspectors continue with business as usual This legislation would make inspections under the MMPI and licensing program essential services so when a state of

emergency is declared the facilities that fall under these programs do not suffer financial hardship and backlogs in their work

By passing L D 1916, we can create a fairer playing field for all of Maine's meat and poultry facilities while ensuring that Maine citizens can continue to support locally grown and processed food