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PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF LD 2125

January 23, 2024

An Act to Establish the Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias Advisory Council Within the Department of Health and Human Services and to Require a State Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Submitted by Michael McKernan, Director, Government and Community Relations
The Jackson Laboratory

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Michael McKernan. I am Director of Government and Community Relations at The Jackson Laboratory, and a resident of Bar Harbor. On behalf of my colleagues, I am pleased to testify in support of LD 2125, an act that will establish an Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias Council, an advisory body that will help coalesce many voices around a shared goal of supporting individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, their families and caregivers.

The terrible impact of this disease is well known to this committee. I'm certain that most of us have direct experience with Alzheimer's disease. Collectively, it's these personal experiences, in addition to the growing public health impact, that inform our support of this legislation.

The Jackson Laboratory is an independent, nonprofit, biomedical research institution with campuses in Bar Harbor, Ellsworth and Augusta. The mission of The Jackson Laboratory is to discover precise genomic solutions to disease and empower the global biomedical community in the shared quest to improve human health. This mission is critically to the State of Maine, where some of the leading causes of death—including Alzheimer's disease—are diseases where the incidence, treatment and outcome of the illness is significantly based in personal genetics.

The Jackson Laboratory is focused on Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other dementias along three interrelated fronts. First, the JAX Center for Alzheimer's and Dementia Research investigates the origins, progression and treatments of AD using the mouse as a model organism. The Center leverages external funding from the National Institutes of Health to better understand the genetics and genomics of the disease and the impact of environmental factors including diet, sleep, and

exercise. <u>Second</u>, JAX is one of five institutions in a national consortium to identify genetic variants and biomarkers for AD; to generate the next generation of mouse models of AD; and to develop a preclinical testing pipeline for possible therapeutics. <u>Third</u>, JAX is a center for workforce development through educational programs including summer internships and workshops, and a cooperative doctoral program in partnership The University of Maine. AD comprises a major portion of the overall JAX research portfolio and is a driver of our mission.

For these reasons, JAX supports this bill, including the duties of the proposed Council to make findings and recommendations related to research, education, workforce development, and increased public awareness of AD and other dementias. Additionally, we would like to recommend the composition of the Council be amended to include a voting member with expertise in current biomedical research related to Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. A member with research background would be an invaluable resource to the Council in terms of subject matter expertise in the biology of the disease; could recommend effective education programs to help expand the clinical workforce; and could help catalyze research partnerships between Maine institutions. The Council, as currently described, seems to lack this important perspective and we recommend the bill be amended to help the Council better perform its stated duties.

In conclusion, The Jackson Laboratory is pleased to support this bill and we recommend the committee vote LD 2123 "ought to pass," including an amendment that the Council invite membership from the biomedical research community.