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Testimony of the
Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO)

Hearing of the Maine Legislature's Joint Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
February 6, 2025

Representative Bill Pluecker, Chair
Senator Rachel Talbot Ross, Chair
Representative Randall Hall, Ranking Member
Senator Russell Black, Ranking Member
Joint Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee
Maine Legislature
Cross Building, Room 214
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: In Opposition to LD 113, An Act to Require Food Labels to Disclose Use of Messenger Ribonucleic Acid Vaccine Material in Food Production

I submit this testimony today on behalf of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) in opposition to LD 113, "An Act to Require Food Labels to Disclose Use of Messenger Ribonucleic Acid Vaccine Material in Food Production"

BIO is a Washington, DC-based trade group representing more than 1,100 biotechnology companies – including some based in Maine - academic institutions, state biotechnology centers, and related organizations across the United States and 31 other nations. BIO members include agricultural, health care, and industrial companies as well as vaccine developers and manufacturers.

Maine's bioscience industry employed 9,946 individuals in 2023 across 640 business establishments. With 22.2 percent growth in bioscience industry employment since 2019, Maine has outpaced the strong job growth seen nationally. The state's average bioscience industry wage was $95,859— 58 percent higher than the private sector average.

LD 113 is based on the false premise that a Messenger Ribonucleic Acid or mRNA vaccine transfers from the injection to the animal to the resulting food product to the human consumer. All animal vaccines—including mRNA vaccines—are approved and regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB), which rigorously assesses the safety, efficacy, and quality of all products. CVB also oversees the manufacturing and distribution of animal vaccines.

While no mRNA animal vaccine has yet been commercialized, in 2016, USDA approved an RNA-platform vaccine to treat swine for influenza A, porcine circovirus, rotavirus and other diseases. The pork industry is supportive of this and other new vaccines that help fight emerging diseases. What's more, mRNA technology and its application to human and animal health has been researched since 1961 and such vaccines are in the early stages of development to treat significant disease threats in animals such as bird flu and African Swine Fever.

Messenger ribonucleic acid is an essential component of all living organisms and has been in cells for billions of years. More importantly, mRNA technology is safe and effective. Specifically, mRNA vaccines use a small strip of genetic code to teach the body to make a specific protein found on a virus and make antibodies to fight against infection. Shortly after mRNA is used to make the protein, it is destroyed and does not linger in the body. mRNA vaccines cannot intermingle with or change the genetic material of the person or animal receiving the vaccine.

Additionally, animal vaccine manufacturers are required to determine a "withdrawal period" to obtain USDA approval. The withdrawal period for animal vaccines is the time between when an animal is vaccinated and when its products can be used for human consumption. This period ensures that the products are free of vaccine residue and safe for human consumption. The typical withdrawal period is 21 to 28 days. As such, no component of the vaccine can be found in the animal prior to slaughter or milking. Furthermore, the primary reason it took so long to develop an mRNA vaccine is because mRNA degrades so easily, making the idea that it could survive through to a human consuming the finished food product (including the withdrawal period) completely implausible.

Numerous agricultural organizations, including the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), have voiced their support for mRNA vaccines. In fact, NASDA approved a policy amendment in February of 2024 that "supports the ability of livestock producers to protect animal health by using vaccines, including mRNA vaccines, that have been approved and licensed by the USDA's Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB) through a rigorous scientific and peer reviewed research process. NASDA supports a robust federal approval and review process for any new vaccine or other animal health tool that can be used to protect the domestic livestock industry from existing or emerging foreign or domestic animal disease outbreaks, safeguarding livestock and public health."

Several bills like LD 113 have been considered by various states since 2023 and none of these measures have been enacted.

In closing, BIO appreciates your time and attention and urges you to report LD 113 as "Ought Not to Pass". Feel free to contact me at gharrington@bio.org or (202) 365-6436 if you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter in further detail.

Sincerely,

Gene Harrington
Senior Director, State Government Affairs. Agriculture and Environment

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About BIO

BIO is a national trade organization, based in Washington, DC, representing more than 1,100 biotechnology companies, academic institutions, state biotechnology centers, and related organizations across the United States and 31 other nations. BIO members are involved in the research and development of healthcare, agricultural, industrial, and environmental biotechnology products. Biotechnology researchers expand the boundaries of science to benefit mankind by providing better healthcare, enhanced agriculture, and a cleaner and safer environment.

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