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Testimony of Representative David Boyer

**Presenting L.D. 540, An Act to Identify the State's Unidentified Human Remains
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 4, 2025**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Representative David Boyer, and I am proud to sponsor L.D. 540, An Act to Identify the State's Unidentified Human Remains. I am grateful for the bipartisan support this bill has received from fellow lawmakers.

This bill, which I am reintroducing after it narrowly failed to become law last session, represents a vital opportunity to bring closure to Maine families and leverage cutting-edge technology to solve longstanding mysteries.

As you may recall, L.D. 838 in the 131st Legislature was one of the 35 bills pocket vetoed by Governor Mills due to procedural disputes last session. I urge you today to focus on its merits and the profound difference it can make for our state.

L.D. 540 directs the Chief Medical Examiner to employ advanced DNA testing and reverse genealogy technology to identify the unidentified human remains currently held by the state. It also establishes a policy to apply this technology to any future remains that remain unidentified after 45 days. This is not untested science—it is a proven tool that has already delivered results right here in Maine.

This technology has a track record of success. In 2022, the Maine State Police used forensic genetic genealogy to identify Jason Follette, a serial predator linked to a 1996 sexual assault and suspected in other crimes—the first such case solved in Maine using this method. In another example, the DNA Doe Project identified a deceased tenant in Oakland in just five weeks, a case that had stumped authorities for four years. These successes show that this technology works—it solves crimes, identifies the deceased, and provides answers where traditional methods fall short.

As of today, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is in possession of 28 unidentified human remains. That represents 28 families who are lacking closure and wondering where their loved ones are. Take the Moreau family, who have been searching for their daughter Kim since 1986—nearly 40 years of not knowing. There are over 20 families like theirs in Maine today, and the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System reports 140 open missing persons cases in our state. L.D. 540 could connect these dots, identifying remains and potentially resolving cases that have lingered for decades.

This bill is about more than solving mysteries; it's about restoring dignity to the deceased and offering closure to those left behind. As a state, we owe it to these families to use every tool at our disposal to provide them with answers.

I know fiscal concerns are on your minds, and I want to address them directly. The Chief Medical Examiner's office estimates that testing the current backlog of unidentified remains would cost around \$100,000, with annual ongoing costs of \$10,000 to \$15,000 depending on new cases. Yes, there's a price tag—but it's modest when weighed against the benefits.

Consider the costs of inaction: the expense of storing unidentified remains indefinitely, the law enforcement resources spent on unresolved cases, and the immeasurable emotional toll on families. Identifying remains could save taxpayer money over time by reducing the need for prolonged investigations. More importantly, the peace it could bring to grieving families is beyond any dollar value.

Maine has a chance to lead—to show that we are a state committed to justice, compassion, and innovation. By passing L.D. 540, we can ensure that no effort is spared in identifying the deceased and supporting their families. This is an opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of Mainers who have suffered too long in silence.

I respectfully urge this committee to support this bill and advance it to the floor. Let's give this bill the chance it deserves to become law and deliver results for our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.