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THE MAINE SENATE

132nd Legislature

**LD 311, "An Act to Improve Efficiency of Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities by
Requiring the Designation of State Inspectors as Essential."
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
Thursday, March 6, 2025**

Good Morning Sen. Talbot-Ross, Rep. Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry:

My name is Senator Stacey Guerin and I represent Senate District 4, which includes all of Piscataquis County and 11 communities in Penobscot County. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today in Support of LD 311, "An Act to Improve Efficiency of Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities by Requiring the Designation of State Inspectors as Essential."

This bill would make state inspections under the Maine Meat and Poultry Inspection (MMPI) program *essential*. As many of you know, these inspections are crucial to ensuring that our local livestock and poultry are handled humanely, are disease-free, and are correctly labeled and packaged. Without these inspections, businesses cannot do their normal operations like slaughtering, packaging, or labeling products. This isn't just a small inconvenience—it has a significant ripple effect, impacting businesses and Maine citizens who rely on locally grown food. 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.

I am before you today supporting 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 unfortunate 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.

The bill also directs the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to require, rather than just authorize as current law allows, that inspections continue at these establishments on state holidays or beyond regular work shifts or workweeks, as long as the necessary inspectors are available. The business would be responsible for covering all overtime salaries for the inspections necessary to keep the plant open, as well as any other expenses caused by the overtime work. This provision is essential in making sure that these businesses can continue operating even when the normal schedule is disrupted.

By passing this bill, we can create a more level playing field for all of Maine's meat and poultry facilities. It ensures that Maine businesses aren't left struggling when state offices are closed, and it helps guarantee that Maine citizens continue to have access to locally grown and processed food. It's a win for local businesses, workers, and consumers alike.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to support this important bill.

Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee
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