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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

L.D. 616, "An Act to Provide Funding to the Maine Semiquincentennial Commission to Commemorate the United States of America's 250th Birthday in 2026"

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State and
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Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government; I am pleased to provide testimony in support of L.D. 616, "An Act to Provide Funding to the Maine Semiquincentennial Commission to Commemorate the United States of America's 250th Birthday in 2026".

America's 250th birthday is upon us. On April 18, we will host an event at the State House to launch Maine's participation in America 250 activities with a "Two Lights for Tomorrow," part of a nationwide initiative to Paul Revere's famous ride that occurred overnight between April 18 and 19th, 1775. This is only the first in what we hope will be a series of events between April 18 and our nation's official birthday on July 4, 2026.

Maine is well prepared for these anniversary events. In 2023, Maine Chapter Law 126 established "a Commission to Commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of the United States." The Maine Semiquincentennial Commission has been working hard to develop and coordinate the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America, through educational and historical events, activities, and programs throughout the State. This anniversary presents a rare opportunity to share the whole history of our nation and further strive towards a more perfect union. It also offers a chance to transform and strengthen the history field, preparing it to thrive for decades to come, especially here in Maine.

To guide its work, the Commission developed three foundational pillars.

Connect: Uniting Maine's Stories with America's Legacy

- Foster a sense of community and shared heritage through collaborative events and discussions.

Share: Illuminating Maine's Legacy in America's Story

- Provide engaging and informative programs that highlight Maine's role in American history and the broader national narrative.

Learn: Examining Maine's Role in America's Ongoing Journey

- Encourage lifelong learning and curiosity about our past, present, and future.

Maine is one of 56 U.S. states and territories with a commission that helps coordinate activities and programming for the upcoming Semiquincentennial. Our Commission plays an important role in determining the scope and direction of the commemoration, interfacing with the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission and America250, recognizing local programming, and, with your support, providing necessary funding.

As part of our community outreach, staff conducted an online survey shared with hundreds of organizations throughout Maine to better understand the current state of organizations' planning efforts. One result stands out: our communities need financial and volunteer support to ensure programming and events surrounding this national milestone are successful. This bill will allow the Semiquincentennial Commission to meet these community needs by providing funding that will match private dollars.

I urge this committee to recognize the importance of honoring and commemorating the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation, helping all Mainers explore and learn from our shared American history by supporting L.D. 616. This will allow our museums, historical societies, and other organizations to demonstrate their value to communities across the state by offering relevant, creative, and sustainable programs and services during the Semiquincentennial and beyond. This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer questions.