



## Department of the Secretary of State

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### JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### TESTIMONY OF SHENNA BELLOWS, SECRETARY OF STATE

Testifying in Favor

L.D. 915, “An Act to Modernize Deed Duplication from Microfilm to a Digital Image”

March 24, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government; I am Shenna Bellows, Maine’s Secretary of State. I am here to share my support for L.D. 915 and ask that you vote, “ought to pass.”

The Maine State Archives’ mission is to preserve the permanent historical records of the state and to make them accessible to the public. This work sometimes includes updating antiquated forms of media. Microfilm and microfiche became common means of document storage and reproduction in the 1970s and ‘80s. Today, the Maine State Archives holds approximately 63,000 roles of microfilm.

But microfilm is problematic as a medium today. Acetate-based microfilm, used until the 1990s, degrades and poses a risk to the film stored around it. When possible, we duplicate older microfilm on to a more stable polyester-based microfilm, but this product fades with prolonged exposure to light. Physical wear and tear cause any microfilm to be scratched, punctured, or smudged, all of which impacts image quality, and leads to degradation or data loss. Microfilm can also only be viewed by one person at a time, requires a special viewer, and must be accessed onsite.

Digital document storage evolved out of the 1990s and is still evolving today – from magnetic tapes and drives to optical technologies like CDs cloud-based drives, and now distributed storage – all of which offered increasingly easier access, larger capacities, and better searchability compared to microfilm. Current law requires that Registries of Deeds keep records of an instrument recorded in that office on microfilm, but L.D. 915 would update the law to require that these records be stored in the form of a digital image stored on magnetic or optical media.

Because they are county-based entities, statute does not require Registrars of Deeds to submit their annually compiled registers to the Archives, but many do for safe keeping. In fact, the Archives keeps the annual deed records for 15 of Maine’s 17 county registries, which accounts for more than 19,000 of our rolls of film. Many registries have already made the transition to digital files. This bill would remove the duplicative and outdated requirement that records be also kept on microfilm.

We recommend the passage of this bill in the interest of history, posterity, and good record keeping. This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions or get additional information to the Committee ahead of the work session. Thank you for your time.