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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry presenting

LD 1140, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Strengthen the Resilience and Growth of Maine's Agricultural Economy"

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and Esteemed Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, my name is Mattie Daughtry, and I proudly serve as President of the Maine State Senate, where I am honored to represent Senate District 23, which includes Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island and part of Yarmouth. Today, I stand before you to introduce LD 1140, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Strengthen the Resilience and Growth of Maine's Agricultural Economy," a critical piece of legislation that proposes a \$45 million bond to fortify the resilience and growth of Maine's agricultural economy.

Maine's agricultural sector is more than just a vital component of our heritage; it is a cornerstone of our overall economy. As we navigate through an era characterized by rapid changes and unprecedented challenges, particularly due to fluctuations in the international trade landscape, it is critical that we support this sector. The agricultural community not only provides essential food and resources for our state but also sustains countless jobs and stimulates local economies across Maine.

I have farmed throughout my life and my mom ran a blueberry field when I was young. As a member of my farmer's market association where I sell a value-added product, I know that being able to diversify and add-value to products helps Maine farmers succeed. Personally, my brewery works with farmers to purchase fresh Maine ingredients and cover-crops that we use in our beer making process because I know that every little bit helps sustain Maine farms. An investment like the one in this proposal would allow creativity to turn into business growth in the farm and forestry sector.

This bond initiative represents a profound investment in the future of our agricultural sector. The proposed funds are strategically aimed at addressing immediate needs and ensuring long-term sustainability in a sector that is fundamental to Maine's identity and economic vitality.

- \$35 million of the bond will be directed to the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund. Established during the 130th Legislature, this fund is crucial for making strategic infrastructure investments that add value to Maine's raw commodities and expand access to new markets. Empowering our agricultural producers through infrastructural support not only enhances their competitiveness but also fosters innovation, ensuring that Maine remains a leader in agriculture. Two thirds of this \$35 million investment would support agricultural products and

food producers and processors and one third of the total would support forest products producers and processors.

- \$5 million will be allocated specifically to support our dairy sector through the Maine Milk Commission. This funding is critical as we act upon the recommendations from the Dairy Taskforce. By revitalizing our dairy industry, we have the opportunity to reverse the concerning trend of dairy farm loss, attract a new generation of farmers, and, importantly, support the myriad of businesses that rely on a robust agricultural framework.
- \$2.5 million is essential for disaster relief, addressing challenges faced by farmers experiencing unforeseen adversities. The harsh winter storms of 2023 and 2024 inflicted considerable damage, and these funds are a lifeline for farmers striving to reclaim their livelihoods in the aftermath.
- Lastly, \$2.5 million will bolster the Land for Maine's Future Working Farmland Access Protection Program, a vital initiative for preserving our working farmland. Ensuring access to land is critical for both current and future agricultural endeavors, safeguarding the future of Maine's rich agricultural legacy.

This bond proposal embodies a unique opportunity to empower growth and innovation within our iconic agriculture, food, and forest products industries. By investing in Maine's agricultural sector, we are investing in the resilience and prosperity of our entire economy.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have, although I know that there will be others behind me who may be better equipped to answer your questions.