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THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry in Support of LD 1340
"An Act to Establish the Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program Fund"
Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
Friday, April 11, 2025

Good morning, Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. I am glad to be here today to present **LD 1340, An Act to Establish the Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program Fund**. I'm proud to sponsor this legislation, which takes a highly successful, in-demand program and gives it permanence within the Maine Department of Transportation.

LD 1340 builds on the strong foundation of the existing Municipal Stream Crossing Upgrade Grant Program—what many of you may know as the “culvert grants.” Since 2015, this program has been helping towns across Maine upgrade and replace outdated culverts on municipal roads. These aren't just infrastructure projects—they are community investments that reduce flooding, improve road safety, protect vital fish and wildlife habitat, and support jobs in engineering, design, and construction.

Let's be clear: **culverts are not flashy**, but they are essential. Beneath our roads and driveways, these structures are the unsung heroes of our transportation and environmental systems. Unfortunately, most of them were built to outdated standards—designed for storms of the past, not the climate realities we're facing today. That's why so many are failing or impeding the natural flow of water and wildlife. According to data from The Nature Conservancy, more than 3,000 stream crossings on municipal roads across Maine pose a barrier to fish passage—and 40% of those are classified as severe.

The Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program has already made a measurable difference. Since it began, the program has supported 172 projects across the state through seven competitive rounds. But demand has consistently outpaced funding—twice as many applications as available grants. That tells us two things: the need is great, and the program is working. Communities see the value, and they're eager to participate.

This bill would formally establish a dedicated fund within MDOT to ensure this program continues long into the future. It keeps the same eligibility and criteria that have guided the program since its inception, providing predictability for municipalities and partners. When towns know that funding will be available over the long term, they can plan ahead—gather resources, work with engineers, and be ready to apply, whether it's their first try or a reapplication.

One critical partner in this work is Maine Audubon's **Stream Smart** program. With support from a broad coalition of federal, state, and nonprofit stakeholders, Stream Smart provides training and best

practices for replacing culverts in a way that is both environmentally sound and economically smart. Stream Smart crossings are more resilient, reduce the risk of washouts, and last longer—which saves taxpayer dollars over time. And don't forget the bigger picture: Maine's brook trout population depend on cold water habitat that is better preserved by practices like these.

I am also sponsoring **LD 836**, a companion bill to LD 1340 which proposes to recapitalize the fund through a general obligation bond. The 131st Legislature made a smart investment in this program, but those dollars are already depleted. Municipalities across the state have projects that depend on the program, but we may be facing a funding gap. Let's not lose the momentum built on during the last decade.

LD 1340 is a cost-effective investment in public safety, environmental stewardship, and Maine's rural and coastal economies. By making this program permanent, we're helping our communities adapt to a changing climate, safeguarding our natural resources, and reinforcing the infrastructure that keeps Maine moving forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'd be happy to answer any questions.