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THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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**Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry in Support of LD 836
“An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Upgrade Municipal Culverts at Stream
Crossings”**

**Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations & Financial Affairs
Tuesday, April 15, 2025**

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee. I am pleased to be here today to present **LD 836, “An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Upgrade Municipal Culverts at Stream Crossings.”** I’m proud to sponsor this legislation, which would recapitalize Maine Department of Transportation’s highly successful Municipal Stream Crossing Upgrade Grant Program.

The Municipal Stream Crossing Upgrade Grant Program is a well utilized funding source for towns across Maine seeking to improve roadway stream crossings. Since 2015, this program has helped towns across Maine upgrade and replace outdated culverts along their municipal roads. Importantly, 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 Unfortunately, most of them were built to outdated standards—designed for storms of the past, not the climate realities we’re facing today.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. 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. Knowing the need is there, this legislation would authorize a \$50,000,000 general obligation bond to recapitalize the program.

LD 836’s companion bill, LD 1340, was heard in the Transportation Committee last week on Friday and would better prepare the fund for future capitalization to ensure the program’s success in 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 accordingly—for instance, they may 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. An important ecological resource, Maine's brook trout population depend on cold water habitat that is better preserved by practices like these.

The primary goal of LD 1340 is to ensure that the Municipal Stream Crossing Upgrade Grant Program does not face an extended funding gap and lapse in accessibility to communities who would make use of it for their infrastructure projects. Since 2015 the fund has found some level of funding in each biennium and maintaining that momentum is important so that the program is familiar to municipalities. 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. **These cost-effective investments in public safety, environmental stewardship, and Maine's rural and coastal economies are bipartisan and benefit every corner of the state.** 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.

If any members are interested in seeing which culverts that have been recently updated or need to be updated in their areas, I invite you to visit maps.tnc.org/maine and tap "Culvert Flood Risk Explorer." This interactive tool provides information about how far traffic would need to detour in case your culvert experienced problems or flooding.

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