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DATE: 04/14/2025
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
FROM: Dr. Jessica Leahy, Henry W. Saunders Distinguished Professor in
Forestry, jessica.leahy@umaine.edu, 207-581-2834

RE: **Testimony on LD 1525, *An Act to Promote Firewood Banks in Maine***

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry:

My name is Jessica Leahy and I am a professor in the School of Forest Resources at the University of Maine. This public flagship university is Maine's only R1 research university and a national leader in forest education, research, and innovation. We are providing written testimony to inform your consideration of LD 1525, *An Act to Promote Firewood Banks in Maine, as amended by the sponsor*. Specifically, we would like to highlight that UMaine is here as a resource and partner for wood bank initiatives.

UMaine has conducted research and provided outreach to wood banks for over a decade. Students and faculty became interested in the use of one of our most abundant renewable resources in Maine – our forests – to address the significant heating insecurity issues in our rural communities. In a recent summary of 211 inquiries, the number of calls for heating assistance were three times the number of calls about food pantries (12,000 calls vs. 4,000 calls between July 2023 and June 2024).

UMaine's research was influential in the development of language included in the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that led to a short-term program focused on expanding capacity and starting new wood banks across the United States. Over the last three years, 130 wood banks have received funding ranging from \$3,500 for start up wood banks to \$15,000 for established wood banks. This was one-time funding for all wood banks distributing less than 100 cords. Maine led the nation in having the most wood banks supported by this funding source. When we began our study of wood banks in 2014, we identified three wood banks in the state of Maine. Now there are 12 wood banks, including the newest one in Wade, the first that we are aware of in Aroostook County.

The areas that would benefit most from a local wood bank are those with both a high percentage of households with high housing cost burden and a high percentage of households that heat primarily with wood. We calculated demand for wood banks based on data from the American Community Survey and 63 communities in Maine had

significant potential demand for a wood bank. This is far more communities than the current 12 wood banks can serve. Links to this research are below.

One thing we have consistently heard from our local wood bank partners is that their primary barriers were knowing about wood banks as a solution to needs in their community and then, figuring out how to get started. LD 1525 provides opportunities for potential leaders and volunteers to learn more about wood banks, and to connect wood banks with one another. Wood banks would benefit from learning more about managing forests for firewood objectives, considerations to prevent the spread of forest pests and diseases, and safe burning practices.

LD 1525 represents a step toward addressing increasing awareness of and resources for wood banks across Maine. UMaine looks forward to continuing to be a resource and partner to the State and others as we move forward with local, renewable solutions to keeping Mainers warm through the winter.

UMaine's National Wood Bank Project -

<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/woodbanks/>

[A Community Guide to Starting & Running a Wood Bank](#), Sabrina Vivian and Jessica Leahy

[Wood Banks are Keeping Communities Warm](#), Elisa Schine

[Where are Wood Banks Needed in Maine? Statewide Wood Bank Demand Analysis](#), Jessica Leahy and Mindy S. Crandall

[Maine Communities with the Highest Potential Wood Bank Demand](#), Jessica Leahy and Mindy S. Crandall

[Potential Wood Bank Demand in Maine Towns by County](#), Jessica Leahy and Mindy S. Crandall

[Wood Bank Demand Analysis Map](#), Jessica Leahy and Mindy S. Crandall