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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS**

**IN SUPPORT OF LD 1605**

*An Act to Support Farmers and Food Banks Affected by Federal Funding Cuts to Their Existing Contracts*

**April 24, 2025**

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (ACF), I am Megan Patterson, the Director of the Division of Animal and Plant Health within the Bureau of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry in support of LD 1605, *An Act to Support Farmers and Food Banks Affected by Federal Funding Cuts to Their Existing Contracts*.

DACF supports LD 1605, recognizing its vital role in addressing the pressing challenges facing Maine's agricultural sector. Our Department has directly witnessed the significant strain that recent sudden federal funding reductions and retractions have placed on Maine's agricultural community and food security networks. This legislation offers crucial bridge funding to maintain the stability of our farming operations and food distribution systems during this transition period, including the termination of the Local Food Purchasing Program (LFPA). We are particularly supportive of this legislation's approach to preserving the vital connections between our farmers and food banks - relationships that our Department has helped foster over many years.

DACF's daily work has highlighted the urgent need for emergency support mechanisms for our farming community. We encounter various types of emergencies, such as severe weather events, unexpected disasters such as fires or health crises, and sudden changes in governmental programs that impact our farmers' operations.

While DACF currently administers several grant and loan programs supporting farmers, foresters, and landowners, we lack a rapid emergency fund distribution mechanism. This limitation has become particularly apparent in light of recent challenges.

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Two notes about how the current bill language would structure the Department's rapid response capacity: First, LD 1605 would nest the Food System Protection Program within 7 MRSA §320 making it part of the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund (AFFPIF). Because that fund vests some decision-making authority with a 17-member advisory board, it may not be the nimblest of the Department's financial assistance tools that could be repurposed in this way, and for that reason, we do not recommend that specific proposal. Second, DACF does not have loan administration expertise on staff. That is why most of DACF's loan programs are administered by the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME), and we anticipate requiring specific resources, which include funds for administration fees, to develop and implement any new loan program successfully, regardless of whether it is administered through FAME or another partner organization. It is important to note that such fees have not been included in the governor's proposed budget.

We stand ready to provide additional information or address any questions during the work session.