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Testimony of Rep. Jennifer Poirier on
**LD 1655, "An Act to Allow the Keeping of Chickens on Private
Residential Property"**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

April 24, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the committee, I am Jennifer Poirier, and I represent House District 70, which is the wonderful community of Skowhegan.

I am pleased to present **LD 655, "An Act to Allow the Keeping of Chickens on Private Residential Property"** at the request of several Maine citizens who have reached out to me asking for assistance.

I want to preface this proposal by saying that I have had multiple conversations with farmers and other stakeholders in recent days who have expressed concern about the language in this bill and the possibility of unintended consequences. I look forward to working with stakeholders and the analyst to refine the language so that it reflects the true intent of the bill. I want to ensure that this legislation does not affect farmers or communities who have embraced the rights of their residents to raise their own food.

For these reasons, I ask that you consider the intent of the bill and not its current language.

When Maine became a leader of the nation by enshrining "Right to Food" into the state constitution, I thought pushback to raising your own food would become a moot point. That is not the case, as municipalities have refused to update ordinances. I have spoken with some of those municipalities, including a code enforcement officer in Waterville, who suggested residents concerned about ordinances as they relate to "Right to Food" should take them to court. Then and only then, would they consider changing their current ordinance. I do not believe residents should have to bear the costs and time relating to judicial proceedings in order to exercise their right to food. That is the basis for my standing before you today.

This legislation aims to protect the rights of Maine residents to keep a reasonable number of backyard chickens for personal use. In doing so, it promotes food security, personal sustainability, and responsible agriculture, all while respecting the integrity of our communities.

District 70 Skowhegan

Backyard chickens are a direct source of fresh, nutritious eggs. In a time when food prices and supply chain disruptions continue to challenge families, the ability to produce one's own eggs is a practical and empowering solution. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average American consumes approximately 279 eggs per year (USDA, 2023). For a family of four, just a small flock of hens can provide most of those eggs year-round.

In Maine, where rural and semi-rural living is common, self-reliance through small-scale food production is part of our tradition and a growing trend among younger families and retirees alike.

Backyard chickens contribute to sustainable living. They help reduce food waste by eating table scraps, their manure is a valuable addition to compost, and they can help control pests on grassy areas and in gardens. The University of New Hampshire Extension notes that backyard chickens can "help divert food scraps from landfills, reduce garden pests, and enrich soil through composted manure" (UNH Extension, 2021).

They also provide educational opportunities for children and adults, encouraging responsibility, awareness of food sources, and care for animals.

Opponents often raise concerns about noise and sanitation. However, hens, not roosters, are typically very quiet, producing less noise than a barking dog. Properly maintained coops and limited flock sizes can eliminate odor or pest issues. Numerous studies and municipal experiences show that when communities follow guidelines, chickens pose no greater nuisance than other common household pets.

In fact, more than 90 cities and towns across Maine, including Portland, South Portland, Bangor, and Brunswick already allow backyard chickens with great success.

The intent of LD 1655 is to ensure that residents are not subject to unnecessary restrictions based on outdated zoning codes and municipal ordinances. This levels the playing field, especially for lower-income residents and renters who may not live in agricultural zones but want to raise chickens for food in a responsible manner.

Across the country, communities large and small have embraced backyard chickens. According to the Pew Research Center, nearly 10 million U.S. households were keeping chickens in their backyard as of 2022, and that number continues to rise (Pew, 2022). This legislation reflects a broader national movement toward sustainable, community-based food systems.

In conclusion, LD 1655 supports Maine families, honors our rural roots, promotes responsible self-sufficiency, and aligns with both modern sustainability practices and our state's values. I urge the committee to support this important and reasonable measure.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will gladly respond to any questions you may have.

Jennifer Poirier
State Representative