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Testimony of Representative Holly Eaton in support of

LD 1336: An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-state Advisory Council

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the committee, my name is Representative Holly Eaton, and I represent House District 15, a coastal and island district in Hancock County. I'm here today in strong support of LD 1336, "An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-state Advisory Council," introduced by Representative Ellie Sato.

The Sister-state relationship between Maine and Aomori Prefecture in Japan was established in 1994—more than 30 years ago. Over the decades, this relationship has grown through cultural, educational, and economic exchanges, including student and teacher visits, municipal partnerships, and artistic collaborations. Portland and Aomori City are also sister cities, which deepens the connection on a local level. And yet, this relationship has largely existed without a formal structure in Maine law—something LD 1336 seeks to change by establishing a diverse and representative Advisory Council to steward this bond into the future.

When I first learned about this bill, I was immediately drawn to its values of connection, cultural exchange, and representation. While my own district may not have a large Japanese American population or a direct tie to Aomori, I see this bill as a powerful opportunity to ensure that all communities—particularly those historically underrepresented—are reflected in our state's cultural and legislative narrative.

On a personal note, this bill reminded me of my time at an all-women's college, Regis College, where my best friend and roommate was Japanese American. That friendship helped shape my understanding of identity, belonging, and the quiet strength of being seen. She taught me about heritage and pride, and also about the ways in which Asian American identities are sometimes overlooked or misunderstood in predominantly white spaces. In many ways, this bill reflects the same values that friendship instilled in me: giving voice to culture, creating lasting partnerships, and honoring our shared humanity.

District 15: Brooklin, Deer Isle, Eagle Island Township, Frenchboro, Southwest Harbor,
Stonington, Swan's Island, Tremont, Isle au Haut, Vinalhaven

The word “Aomori” means “Blue Forest,” a name that beautifully mirrors Maine’s own landscape of woods and water. We are two places rooted in natural beauty, maritime tradition, and deep community pride. There’s something deeply poetic—and deeply fitting—about strengthening this relationship through formal legislation.

Supporting LD 1336 is about more than honoring history—it’s about choosing to sustain meaningful connection, to listen across cultures, and to ensure that future generations of Mainers continue to benefit from the kind of friendship that shaped me in college and continues to inform the work I do today.

I want to thank Representative Sato for bringing this forward. I am proud to support it, and I respectfully urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1336.

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