



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC  
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL DUGUAY  
COMMISSIONER

**April 24, 2025**

**Testimony of Maureen Terry**

**LD 1336, An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister State Advisory Council**

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and Members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Mo Terry, and I am the legislative liaison for the Department of Community and Economic Development, and I am testifying on behalf of the Maine International Trade Center (MITC).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 1336, An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-state Advisory Council. The department is generally supportive of the Council. This sister city relationship has existed since Governor Baldacci created the Council by Executive Order in 1994, with political and community support ebbing and flowing over the years. The council has staying power and, given the right structure, could continue its work in a more sustained function. We've reviewed the two economies for synergies and there is some potential for coordination on the ocean economy, tourism, and outdoor recreation. That said, Aomori is much like Maine, so we need to appropriately calibrate our investment for the potential return. With this in mind, we would like to propose several considerations that may enhance the effectiveness of the Council.

First, regarding the council's composition, the proposed membership of 14 appointed members, in addition to a member from MITC, may be too large and too prescriptive for efficient operations. A smaller initial membership with more at large seats would allow for a more agile group, while still ensuring diverse representation. This approach would also leave room for future growth as the council's activities expand and evolve. We recommend reducing the number of appointed members to a more manageable level to facilitate productive discussions and decision-making.



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Second, we note that the bill contains limited language regarding economic development or trade. Given the importance of trade and commerce to the work of the Maine International Trade Center, we wonder if this is the most appropriate entity to house the council's activities. Tying culture, education and recreation to economic development or trade may help ensure that these aspects receive adequate attention.

Additionally, we recommend refining the language regarding funding. Instead of stating that the initiative "provides ongoing funds to support the Maine-Aomori Sister-state Advisory Council," we propose revising it to "provides ongoing funds to MITC to support the activities of the group." This revision clarifies the role of MITC in administering the funds and aligns with the intent to support the council's work effectively.

Lastly, we would like to see an operating agreement that sets clear expectations for the council's work, responsibilities, and governance. Establishing such an agreement would ensure transparency, accountability, and a well-defined scope of activities for the council moving forward.

We appreciate this effort to formalize and support the Maine-Aomori sister-state relationship and encourage thoughtful revisions to strengthen the bill's framework. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to continued discussions on this important initiative.