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*Testimony of Rep. Tiffany Roberts presenting*

### **LD 1516, An Act to Strengthen the Maine Development Foundation** *Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development*

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. I am Representative Tiffany Roberts, and I represent House District 149, which includes parts of North and South Berwick. Thank you for the opportunity to present **LD 1516, An Act to Strengthen the Maine Development Foundation.**

This bill is a companion to LD 629, which we passed unanimously out of this committee at the end of March to restore the public match funding for the Maine Development Foundation (MDF). LD 1516 includes two policy provisions that would strengthen MDF. The first measure would extend the term limits for MDF board members from five years to eight years.

Unlike many nonprofits, the MDF Board term limits are set in statute, so they cannot be adjusted in their bylaws. The current maximum of five one-year terms is much shorter than most boards and agencies. MDF Board members, upon terming out, have been asking to serve longer (how often does that happen in nonprofits!).

As we have all learned, MDF is a small but multifaceted agency with a wide variety of programs, diverse funding sources and business relationships all across Maine. Current and past board members have highlighted the need for a good learning curve on the board, believing they could have much more strategic impact and assist the work of MDF better with a bit more time on the board – while continuing to refresh the membership regularly with the proposed 8-year limits (two, 4-year terms).

This would also help internal board development as board members are currently stepping in to chair the board after only 2-3 years of exposure to MDF programming.

Secondly, the bill seeks to make it even easier for other state agencies to collaborate and work with MDF by amending state procurement statutes to more expressly allow – but not require – the executive branch to sole source projects to MDF where appropriate. Specifically, MDF would still need to be “the most economical, effective and appropriate” for the work involved. The proposed provision is modeled exactly on the current language dating all the way back to

1989, which permits state agencies to collaborate directly with the University of Maine System on a sole source basis. Broadly speaking, MDF's chartering statute already clearly intends for other agencies to collaborate with MDF on initiatives to grow Maine's economy, which would give a little more edge to that.

Whether or not the Legislature can expand the direct general fund support for MDF, we should strengthen and sustain MDF by leveraging this entity we created, to work on other appropriate, funded economic development projects. We should not reinvent the wheel or spend months of effort on an RFP when the best partner is right here.

I know "sole source" can be a controversial issue. If this approach isn't supported by the committee, I've talked with MDF about dropping it from the final bill. However, I know as a committee, we will continue to get creative in ensuring we sustain and leverage the capabilities and confidence we have in MDF. For example, we could consider adding a "sunrise" provision in our economic development statutes that ensures that new projects and entities are not created as standalones if they would be best done by existing strong resources like MDF and FAME. Perhaps even without statutory action, we can encourage entities like the Land Bank and MDF to share resources for maximum impact.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to take any questions.