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THE MAINE SENATE
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***Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry introducing
LD 1637, "An Act to Reform the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority"
Before the Joint Standing Committee Housing and Economic Development
May 2, 2025***

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Mattie Daughtry and I am proud to serve as the President of the Maine State Senate, where I am honored to represent Senate District 23, which includes Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island and part of Yarmouth. I am here today to introduce LD 1637, "An Act to Reform the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority," a bill that seeks to reshape the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA) to better reflect the needs and concerns of our community, especially in light of recent events that have highlighted significant environmental issues at Brunswick Landing.

As many of you are aware, Brunswick Landing has experienced serious challenges recently, particularly the devastating firefighting foam spill in August 2024. This incident released over 1,400 gallons of toxic firefighting foam mixed with 50,000 gallons of water and laced with harmful forever chemicals, into our environment. The repercussions of this spill are not merely an ecological concern; they directly impact the health and well-being of Brunswick residents and our surrounding neighbors. This event underscored the urgent need for accountability and transparent governance from MRRA.

LD 1637 is a response to these pressing issues but it is also about good governance in general. It aims to amend MRRA's goals to explicitly include "environmental stewardship" as a critical focus. As we have made significant strides in economic development at Brunswick Landing, we must now recognize that protecting our environment and the health of our residents is part of the necessary stewardship of this area. This bill removes certain environmental permitting exemptions currently in place for Brunswick Landing, which were established concerning its status as a former military facility. It is crucial that we remove these exemptions to prevent any future environmental incidents and hold the MRRA accountable for the stewardship of the land they manage. This change will promote public health protections and enhance transparency, providing the community with a stronger voice in decisions that affect our environment.

By adding provisions such as the requirement for property transfers within the former base to adhere to the Maine Uniform Environmental Covenants Act, we are ensuring ongoing environmental monitoring and protection. This is not just about addressing past mistakes; it is about safeguarding our future.

Expanding the number of board members to 14 and including more Brunswick residents on the MRRA board not only enhances local representation but also ensures that the voices of those most affected by MRRA's decisions are heard in a meaningful way. This was a direct ask from my constituents after the spill.

I urge this committee to support LD 1637 as a necessary step toward building a more sustainable and accountable framework for the MRRA. The absence of transparent governance has led to real-world consequences that we can no longer afford. It is time we prioritize environmental stewardship alongside economic growth at Brunswick Landing.

I would also like to note that I have introduced an amendment to remove the provision of the bill that would have removed the authority's inclusion under the Maine Tort Claims Act and the related liability protections for trustees and employees. After talking with stakeholders, it's clear that by removing this protection, it would make it more challenging to attract and retain folks on the MRRA board and ultimately would be detrimental to its important work.

Additionally, this amendment slightly changes the makeup of the board to include a requirement that three of the ten members appointed by the Governor must be a resident of Brunswick or Brunswick town officials or business owners and one must be a Topsham resident, town official or business owner. Both Topsham and Brunswick have property that was owned and operated by the Navy, and thus have a direct stake in these spaces going forward.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your support of this important legislation. I'm happy to take any questions that you may have.