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AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Daniel J. Ankeles

7 Beech Drive
Brunswick, ME 04011
Dan.Ankeles@legislature.maine.gov
Cell Phone: (207) 756-3793

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Testimony of Rep. Dan Ankeles in support of

LD 1637, An Act to Reform the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and fellow members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you. I am Representative Dan Ankeles, and I serve House District 100, which is a central portion of Brunswick that includes the former Brunswick Naval Air Station. It's my pleasure to join you as the lead co-sponsor of **LD 1637, An Act to Reform the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority**.

You've already heard from President Daughtry an excellent recap of why we are here and what the bill does. You also already heard from me a couple months ago when you held two confirmation hearings for locally vetted appointees to the MRRA board. You gave both nominees your unanimous approval, and I can't thank this committee enough for taking that first crucial step toward restoring Brunswick's voice at the former airbase.

I mentioned to you at the time that those confirmation hearings were part of a multi-pronged approach to recovering from the foam spill and preventing future crises. Here is what else has happened since the last time we were together.

Over in ENR, we passed three spill response bills, one of which directs MRRA to shut down its AFFF fire suppression systems, remove all remaining foam concentrate and purge the systems of all remaining PFAS residue. This is work that is already underway even before the resolve has been signed into law. The other two bills take Brunswick's tragedy and use it to begin ridding the rest of Maine of the same toxic foam, first through a statewide inventory and then through a take-back program modeled after other successful states. The inventory bill is on the Appropriations Table and has identified funding sources. The Fire Marshal and the DEP Commissioner have been incredible partners so far.

We are also developing a much stronger version of MRRA's Jobs Increment Financing program, which will have its own public hearing in this very room a week from now. I'm sure you'll be on the edge of your seats.

At the local level, our Town Council has been dogged, both in its pursuit of accountability and positive action from MRRA and in its willingness to compartmentalize the community's differences with MRRA and build a new partnership from scratch. They have provided sunlight where there was once opacity, and they have facilitated higher levels of public engagement.

I'm especially proud of the time that the new MRRA Executive Director, Dan Stevenson, and I have spent together. His first week on the job was the same week that ENR heard my spill cleanup resolve, so we didn't get to meet until after he had provided testimony. Since that day, we have stayed in close contact on AFFF removal, next week's JTIF bill and the amended language on 1637 that you have before you today. Together we have hit a reset button I would never have thought possible nine months ago. While I expect that both Director Stevenson and the DECD will come in as Neither For Nor Against today, I think you will come away with a sense that together we have found common ground.

We have universal agreement around the site location language, property transfer covenant language, codifying environmental stewardship as one of MRRA's statutory mission goals and on most of the membership adjustments. President Daughtry and I have also agreed, at the request of MRRA, the town and the Administration to strike the section referencing the Maine Tort Claims Act.

The one remaining area where there is still a small amount of friction and uncertainty among stakeholders is Section 4 of the amended version of the bill, which deals with membership. I appreciate your patience as I walk you through the lines where conversations were still taking place as recently as yesterday.

In Paragraph C, MRRA would like the language to specify that the term "town official," which is used to reference both Brunswick and Topsham in that paragraph, refer solely to a member of town staff. I'm OK with that, as municipal elected officials would already be covered under the term "resident" in that same paragraph.

In Paragraphs F and G, there is still a little heartburn. I think the Administration would probably like Paragraph F to include a sentence that requires Brunswick's municipal government to act as quickly as possible to appoint someone new, should the Council Chair's nomination not be approved by the Council. The concern there is if you go too long with a vacancy, you might have an even number of board members at a time when a key decision might need to be made.

In Paragraph G, the Administration had questions about its constitutionality. You'll hear more about that from others testifying, but I will say that I feel strongly that having an ex-officio non-

voting legislator on the MRRA Board creates a critical, official and non-invasive bridge between stakeholders that will make the work we all do together better and more likely to succeed. I would strongly suggest keeping it.

And finally, in that section I just want to note Paragraph D, which adds a second commissioner or their designee. This seat was proposed with the intent of bringing in the DOT, a request of both the Administration and MRRA. We all agree this is a good idea, given both the vast infrastructure needs on the former airbase and major projects happening soon on major roads nearby.

Thanks for your patience today. I've seen your schedule, and believe me I have been there this session. I want to close with the single most important part of my testimony. For the last nine months, my community has been in pain. There are deep psychological, public health, environmental and financial wounds when you have the worst toxic foam spill in Maine's history, one of the worst in the entire country's history.

We cannot rebuild trust with this reform. We cannot restore Brunswick's voice to the former airbase without this reform. We cannot protect the Landing's prosperity without this reform. And we cannot heal the land and waterways on this property without this reform. The people of Brunswick need this to happen. They have been organizing around this legislation, and they are deeply invested in what you do today.

I can't see where the amended version of this bill would have any sort of state fiscal impact, so I hope that makes your decision a relatively easy one. It's time to bring Brunswick's "town within a town" situation to a graceful end.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you in support of this essential bill. I am happy to answer questions.