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**Testimony of Vanessa Sperrey, Director of External Affairs, Maine Emergency Management Agency, Department of Defense, Veterans, and Emergency Management**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

**LD 1848 – An Act to Implement Recommendations for Improved Dam Safety**

**May 7, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

My name is Vanessa Sperrey. I'm the Director of External Affairs at the Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). While MEMA is neither testifying *for* nor against LD 1848, I would like to provide some additional context.

In May of 2022, the 130th Maine Legislature passed into law, LD 1488, Resolve, To Study and Recommend Improvements to Maine's Dam Safety. This Resolve required three key elements:

- 1) A dam safety peer review, to be conducted by the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) (completed and attached for reference);
- 2) The establishment and meeting of a stakeholder group to review the results of said peer review and discuss any recommendations; And
- 3) a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over veterans' affairs that includes the results of the peer review received pursuant to section 1, a summary of the stakeholder review under section 2 and any recommendations for the improvement of dam safety resulting from the stakeholder review, including suggested legislation.

In response to the legislative requirements, the ASDSO completed a dam safety peer review on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Next, a stakeholder group was established and convened on January 4<sup>th</sup>, January 18<sup>th</sup>, and February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. And lastly, on February 14, 2024, the Department of Defense, Veterans, and Emergency Management (DVEM or "department") provided the final report to the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs (VLA).

LD 1848, in alignment with the aforementioned report, adjusts requirements for Maine's dam safety program by, among other items, requiring interdepartmental coordination between the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and DVEM, increasing the frequency of inspections of significant and high-hazard dams, adding 12-year comprehensive owner-funded reviews, mandating the establishment of various new rules, and requiring *pre-construction* emergency action plans with periodic testing.

This legislation would necessitate significant DVEM resources that are not currently available, such as permanent dam inspectors with competitive salaries within six months, a requirement to inventory and prioritize noncompliant dams, and an annual report to the Legislature—culminating in a January 1, 2026, funding-needs assessment to the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

DVEM supports Maine's dam safety program and working towards the "model program" standard that the ASDSO described in the 2022 report. The ASDSO report's primary recommendation identified the need for additional funding and increased staffing to enable the program to meet its existing statutory obligations. The budget proposed in the report included funding to support an additional Professional Engineer, Assistant Engineer, and Administrative Assistant—positions critical to building and sustaining program capacity. Should the committee wish to move forward with this legislation, the department stands prepared to provide the necessary information to help inform a fiscal note.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and support. I welcome any questions you may have and look forward to further discussions in the work session.