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Testimony of Representative Holly Eaton in support of

LD 1578 – An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to Review Disruption to or Removal of Health Services

Before the Health and Human Services Committee

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services,

My name is Representative Holly Eaton, and I represent House District 15, which includes the rural and island communities of Deer Isle, Stonington, Brooklin, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Frenchboro, Swan's Island, Isle au Haut, and Vinalhaven. I'm here today to testify in strong support of LD 1578, and I'm grateful to Representative Dodge for bringing this important legislation forward.

LD 1578 could not be more timely. On March 28th, Mount Desert Island Hospital announced that it will close its Labor and Delivery department effective July 1. While there is another birthing center in Ellsworth, MDI Hospital has long served as the most accessible and trusted option for a large portion of my district—including multiple unbridged islands and remote communities that face significant transportation barriers. For many families, MDI is not just a hospital—it's *their* hospital.

The closure of labor and delivery services at MDI Hospital is a clear example of why LD 1578 is necessary. People in my district cannot simply drive a few extra miles to access care. For many, it's a boat ride followed by hours in a car. Even for those who live on Mount Desert Island itself, there is only one road on and off the island—and in the summer months, it's often backed up with traffic heading into and out of Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park. What should be a routine delivery becomes a high-risk situation. For pregnant people in island communities, it's not just inconvenient—it's dangerous.

District 15: Brooklin, Deer Isle, Eagle Island Township, Frenchboro, Southwest Harbor, Stonington, Swan's Island, Tremont, Isle au Haut, Vinalhaven

Yet residents were not notified directly about this change. There were no letters, no phone calls, and no opportunity to ask questions in advance. Most people found out online. And when a “community conversation” was eventually held, the decision had already been made—and hospital officials did not respond to questions. That is not real public engagement, and it’s not what our communities deserve.

We’re watching the very fabric of our community being slowly dismantled. Families are already being pushed off the island because of rising housing costs. Losing access to local labor and delivery services feels like another nail in the coffin—a signal that young families aren’t expected or supported here anymore. It’s heartbreaking. And it raises bigger concerns: if one essential service can disappear without a plan, without notice, and without accountability—what else might follow?

That’s why LD 1578 is so important. It gives the Department of Health and Human Services the authority to review significant disruptions to care—even years after a certificate of need has been issued. It ensures there’s a mechanism to assess the impact of such changes and determine whether they truly serve the health and safety of the region. It says that decisions affecting entire communities cannot be made behind closed doors.

When families can’t count on safe, local access to labor and delivery services, it affects their ability to remain in—or return to—the communities they love. It strains emergency services, deters new residents, and erodes public trust. Rural and island Mainers deserve the same basic access and respect as anyone else in this state. LD 1578 moves us closer to that goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and speak on behalf of the constituents who rely on MDI Hospital. I respectfully urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1578.