

Maine Dairy Industry Association
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

in support of

LD 1838 An Act to Provide Opportunities and Sustainable Revenue for Maine Farms, Agricultural Fairs, Wabanaki Tribes and Veterans' Homes

May 7, 2025

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and esteemed members of the Committee:

My name is Annie Watson. I am an organic dairy farmer from Whitefield, and I serve as the President of the Maine Dairy Industry Association. MDIA represents the 137 cow-dairy farms in the state shipping milk. Our farms are located in 15 of Maine's 16 counties. MDIA represents all of Maine's dairies, no matter the size or style of operation. Our producers range in size from five to 2,000 cows. We have 90 farms producing milk using conventional systems of production, and 47 using organic systems. All but two of these farms are owned and managed by Maine families. Some are multi-generational families who have stewarded Maine's farmland for hundreds of years, while many are first generation farmers, just starting on their own family's farm journey. It is on behalf of these farms that I am here today to express our strong support for LD 1838, "An Act To Provide Opportunities and Sustainable Revenue for Maine Farms, Agricultural Fairs, Wabanaki Tribes, and Veterans' Homes."

Maine's dairy industry is a cornerstone of our agricultural economy, contributing significantly to the state's rural vitality and food security. However, our farmers face ongoing challenges, including fluctuating milk prices, rising operational costs, and market uncertainties. These pressures have led to a concerning decline in the number of dairy farms in Maine.

LD 1838 proposes innovative solutions to support our agricultural communities by establishing sustainable revenue streams. By allocating funds to support Maine farms and agricultural fairs, this legislation recognizes the critical role these institutions play in our state's heritage and economy.

For the dairy sector, the bill's provisions could provide much-needed financial support for our one of a kind Dairy Stabilization Program, otherwise known as the Tier Program. This program has been a life-line for Maine's dairy industry. It is a smart investment in the economic resilience of our rural

regions. Without it, we risk losing more farms, open land, and local milk processors—losses that would be incredibly difficult to reverse.

In an era where food security, local sourcing, and climate-resilient farming are more important than ever, strengthening the Dairy Stabilization Tier Program is a step in the right direction. It ensures that our farms don't just survive, but have a real chance to thrive. Such investments are essential for enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of all Maine's farms. Any investment into this program is welcome, though we would ask that the funding stream be thoroughly vetted to ensure the Tier Program is not impacted negatively, through issues with legality.

By supporting agricultural fairs, LD 1838 helps preserve vital community events that showcase our farming traditions and foster public engagement with agriculture. These fairs are instrumental in educating the public about all types of farming, including dairy and promoting local products.

We also commend the bill's inclusion of support for the Wabanaki Tribes and veterans' homes, reflecting a comprehensive approach to community development and respect for all who contribute to Maine's rich tapestry.

MDIA urges the Committee to support LD 1838. This legislation offers strategic investments in our state's agricultural future, ensuring that Maine's dairy farms can continue to thrive and nourish our communities.

Thank you for your consideration.