



May 7, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

My name is Barry W. Norris, and I am here today on behalf of the **Maine Association of Agricultural Fairs**, representing over 25 agricultural fairs held annually across our state—from large, multi-day expositions to small, rural celebrations of Maine's deep agricultural heritage.

I am here to offer our **strong support for LD 1838**, which presents a vital opportunity to deliver **sustainable, community-centered revenue** to organizations that are pillars of Maine's cultural and economic fabric: farms, agricultural fairs, Wabanaki tribal governments, veterans' homes and the harness racing industry.

### **The Economic Importance of Maine's Agricultural Fairs**

Agricultural fairs are more than cherished local traditions—they are **economic engines** for rural and urban communities alike:

- Each year, Maine's fairs attract **over 800,000 visitors**, generating **tens of millions of dollars** in direct and indirect economic activity.
- According to a 2022 regional analysis, spending related to agricultural fairs in Maine supports **over 1,500 jobs**, ranging from vendors and food producers to entertainers and agricultural educators.
- Fairs provide a **critical marketing and sales platform** for Maine farmers, crafters, and small businesses, often representing their most significant income-generating events of the year.
- Nonprofit agricultural fairs reinvest revenue into **community education, 4-H programs, fairground maintenance, youth scholarships, and agricultural outreach**, strengthening the local food system and youth involvement in farming.

## Why LD 1838 Matters

LD 1838 proposes a model that will **allocate a portion of newly regulated gaming revenues** to support longstanding community institutions and economically vulnerable sectors, without burdening taxpayers.

For agricultural fairs specifically, this bill would offer:

- **Predictable, long-term revenue** that can stabilize operational budgets, support critical infrastructure upgrades, and expand educational programming.
- Resources to maintain and improve **public safety, sanitation, and accessibility**, ensuring fairs can continue serving Maine communities safely and equitably.
- Capacity to expand agricultural programming that connects the public—especially younger generations—to Maine's working landscape and food systems.

We also commend the bill's commitment to **equity and inclusion**, supporting Wabanaki tribes and veterans' homes with a share of the benefits—ensuring that this revenue serves not only economic ends, but social justice and community resilience.

## Conclusion

At a time when family farms, rural communities, and local institutions are under increasing financial pressure, LD 1838 provides a creative, fair, and forward-thinking solution.

Supporting this bill means **investing in the vitality of Maine agriculture, preserving our cultural traditions**, and **sustaining the fairs that connect generations to the land and to each other**.

On behalf of the Maine Association of Agricultural Fairs, I urge you to vote **Ought to Pass** on LD 1838, SP 721. Thank you for your time and your commitment to Maine's farms and fairs.