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Testimony of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In support of LD 2108, *An Act to Establish the Suicide Mortality Review Panel*

Sponsor: Representative Stover
Hearing Date: February 4, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Jamie Bourque, and I serve as the Director of the Office of Injury and Violence Prevention within Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services and I am here today to testify in support of LD 2108, *An Act to Establish the Suicide Mortality Review Panel*.

First, I want to thank Representative Stover for sponsoring this bill on behalf of the Department. It is being proposed as a step in a comprehensive planning process led by the Bureau of Veterans' Services (BVS). BVS received federal funding, jointly issued from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the US Department of Veterans Affairs, to explore the feasibility of creating a suicide mortality review panel in Maine. Along with BVS, the planning group included participation from Department of Public Safety, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, DHHS, and several key stakeholder groups. During this planning process, the Office of Injury and Violence Prevention (OIVP) within Maine CDC was established. As a result of this process, the working group suggested that such a panel be established in Maine, and that the newly established OIVP be tasked with leading this work.

Maine has one of the highest rates of suicide in New England, and suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for Maine residents who are 10 to 24 years of age. This bill recognizes the urgent need to create a systematic and data-driven approach to understanding suicide in our state. LD 2108 will establish a panel, comprised of healthcare professionals, public health officials, first responders, individuals with lived experience, and other subject matter experts tasked with reviewing deaths by suicide. The panel will conduct comprehensive retrospective reviews of cases, examine contributing factors, identify gaps in systems of care, and recommend changes or improvements to prevent future deaths. LD 2108 would grant specific authority to review data from multiple sources to build a clearer picture of the risk and protective factors within Maine's communities.

While Maine has several existing mortality review panels that provide critical insight and analysis for public health threats, we do not have an ongoing group of experts focused on death by suicide. Other panels have been instrumental in identifying patterns, influencing policy, strengthening training, and improving resource allocation. Establishing a panel specifically focused on suicide will enable the State's prevention strategies to be informed by careful analysis. This bill provides a

structure for that necessary analysis to better understand why suicides occur and how they might be prevented.

This bill also includes thoughtful provisions for contacting next of kin. Families and loved ones often have critical insights into the circumstances leading up to a suicide, insight that cannot be captured through medical records or incident reports. The bill allows the panel to invite voluntary participation from next of kin in a way that is both respectful and trauma-informed, ensuring they are not compelled to participate but rather are given the opportunity to be heard if they wish. It will also afford the opportunity of being connected to bereavement and mental health resources. This will help reduce the long-term impacts of suicide loss, including elevated risk of depression and suicide among survivors themselves.

Finally, LD 2108 includes a requirement for a detailed annual report with findings and recommendations that will be submitted annually to the Governor, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Legislature. This will allow for both accountability and action. It creates a feedback loop so that lessons learned from deaths by suicide directly inform improvements in prevention strategies, crisis services, workforce trainings, and cross-agency coordination.

In closing, establishing a suicide mortality review panel is an evidence-based public health strategy that aligns with Maine's ongoing commitment to suicide prevention and has support across agencies and constituencies. I hope you will ensure that this resource is available to Maine by supporting LD 2108.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to make myself available for questions at the work session.