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Testimony For:
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I'm David Richmond, Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services (MBVS) and I'm here today to testify for *LD 2108 – An Act to Establish the Suicide Mortality Review Panel*.

LD 2108 proposes the establishment of a Suicide Mortality Review Panel. Maine has the highest veterans' suicide rate in the Northeast and nearly three quarters of our veterans' suicide involve firearms. Despite rigorous prevention efforts, we still have a higher percentage of veterans' suicides than our regional counterparts, which indicates that something is missing in our prevention model.

The creation of this panel brings veterans' suicide prevention efforts in Maine full circle as the Bureau founded the Maine Safer Homes Taskforce in 2019 and has collaborated for the last four years with Veterans Affairs and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as part of the Governor's and Mayor's Challenges to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families and as a recipient of the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Grant.

The Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services recognizes the value in the formation of this multidisciplinary panel to include the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and foresees it overlapping with other already established panels such as the Accidental Drug Overdose Review Panel. The panel would be responsible for systematically reviewing suicide deaths to generate actionable, data-driven, trauma-informed recommendations that strengthen prevention efforts especially for Veterans.

Passage of the Suicide Mortality Review legislation would activate a coordinated, statewide public health mechanism for understanding suicide deaths and transforming those insights into meaningful prevention strategies. Within the first year, Maine will have a seated and trained committee, robust data processes, completed case reviews, and a concrete set of recommendations ready to inform policy, resource allocation, and system design.

The Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services is committed to preventing Service Members, Veterans, and their Families suicides and the creation of the Suicide Mortality Review Board will help with these prevention efforts. We are tracking this bill and watch for it to be scheduled.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Richmond
Director, Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services