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Testimony of Rep. Matthea Daughtry Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education In Support of L.D. 1130 An Act To Provide Traffic Safety Education in Schools

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and fellow distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Representative Matthea Daughtry and I represent House District 49, which is part of Brunswick. I am here today to present L.D. 1130, "An Act To Provide Traffic Safety Education in Schools."

This bill is personal for me. It's my top legislative priority this session, and as such I'm going to ask all of you to indulge me in sharing the reasons why this bill means so much to me.

I owe my life to a bicycle and a helmet. This has proven true for me in two different stories.

The first is in how my parents met. A long time ago in a town not too far from here, my father decided that he wanted to bike to Mexico from Maine. He trained and trained and on one fateful October day, he set off from Brunswick with dreams of making it to that far-away southern border. Alas, he only made it to Beaufort, North Carolina, where a strong headwind blew him into town and straight to a local band performance where he met my mother. Or at least that's what they told me!

The second is in how a helmet saved my life. Bikes have been a part of my life since the very beginning. I grew up biking with my father from an early age--I can still remember my very first bicycle (it was pink)! Growing up around cycling enthusiasts, I heard many folks say that there are two groups of riders, those who have been hit and those who will be hit. As an avid cyclist, that saying always used to annoy me. Now it haunts and disturbs me. On May 6th, 2016, I became a statistic. I joined that other group of riders.

I was close to my home, and in front of an early-childhood center, when I was struck by a motor vehicle operator who failed to yield the right of way to me. As I was picking myself up off the pavement my mind was overrun with a plethora of thoughts. What do I do? What happened? Where is my title and registration? Wait, I'm on a bike! I was riding following the bike lane. What on earth am I supposed to do! Here I was thinking I knew the rules of road and what to do and suddenly realizing that I had even more to learn.

In the days following the crash I knew I wanted to try and find a silver lining. There had to be something I could do. During those days I heard an outpouring of stories from people about their

experiences as cyclists, pedestrians, drivers, etc. Everyone had a story. Some positive and some very negative. Many shared experiences of concern about the lack of education for people to be good stewards when using our roadways. Compounding this is the increasing number of bicycle and pedestrian fatalities in our state. 2015 was the deadliest years in Maine for bicycle and pedestrian fatalities, with 2016 right behind it. This year, we've already had a disturbing amount of pedestrian fatalities--we are up to four--including a young student in Lewiston and a young man crossing a street in my town. We have to do more to reverse this terrifying trend.

So how best to address this problem? We need to make sure that all Mainers are taught safe practices and respect for everyone using our roadways. In the aftermath of my crash, I met with the Bicycle Coalition of Maine and asked what we could do to improve the safety of everyone. We discussed a variety of options and talked to stakeholders. The result is the bill before you.

LD 1130 would ensure that every Maine student will receive at least one hour of "age-appropriate" traffic safety education every year. This means that elementary students will learn basic and important road safety concepts--like look both ways before you cross the street, etc. In middle school, students will learn how to safely ride their bicycles independently while obeying the rules of the road. High School students will learn how to safely drive near other users of the road such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, farm equipment, etc. This bill will ensure that consistent information on roadway safety is being taught in a way that is accessible to all students, regardless of their zip-code.

This is building off of an existing program that is funded by the Department of Transportation and is currently being assisted by the Bicycle Coalition. The curriculum for this program was developed by teachers for teachers. If a school district does not want to teach the program themselves, they can request a presenter to deliver the materials as well. This is an existing program with built-in supports for our schools. There are representatives from the Coalition behind me who can describe the program (and bill) in more detail.

Most importantly for me, this would not become a graduation requirement. Our students would not have to demonstrate proficiency in order to graduate.

There are two things I would like to amend on the bill. First I would like to strike the "one-hour" requirement and instead say one class period. This leaves the length and depth up to local districts. In addition I would be amenable to altering the bill to fewer grade levels. For example, this could be taught in Grades 4, 6, 8, and 10. But I leave that up to the committee to discuss later in our work session.

Thank you for your time today and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.