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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

LD 493 An Act To Allow Custom Slaughterhouses To Produce Cuts of Meat To Be Sold Commercially in the State

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:

My name is Julie Ann Smith and I am the Executive Director of Maine Farm Bureau, the state's largest farmer-run advocacy organization. We have represented the voice of all agriculture in Maine for 70 years and I am grateful to have the opportunity to serve as the voice of our farmers today.

Last November, during our Association's virtual Annual Meeting, a farmer brought forward a concern about the lack of processing facilities in Aroostook County, and the severe negative impact it was having on her livestock and farm. The farmer proposed the idea that custom slaughter operations could be used to meet the demand for locally processed meat. That idea became a resolution that was affirmatively supported Maine Farm Bureau's farmer-members.

Currently, custom slaughter operations primarily focus on the processing of wildlife and livestock for personal consumption and many only operate seasonally. These facilities are inspected annually by the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. Several of these facilities are interested in expanding to include processing of livestock for commercial sale. However, lack of access to capital and a limited workforce leave most processors without any incentive to expand.

We believe the Department has the resources to immediately address the urgent need for livestock processing in Maine to meet consumer and farmer demands. This could be accomplished in a number of ways:

- Provide a two-year provisional license so that processing facilities may simultaneously build facilities while increasing the number of animals they are capable of processing;
- Increase the number of inspectors by re-appropriating unfilled positions within the Department;
- Allow a small number of animals to be processed without an inspector being present during processing, when certain criteria are met, similar to the exemption for poultry;
- Prioritization of livestock processing for Agricultural Development Grants;
- Develop a permanent Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) assistance program in conjunction with University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

We urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 493 to prioritize the urgent needs expressed by Maine farmers to meet increasing consumer demand.

Thank you for your time today and your service to the people of Maine, including our farmers. I would be happy to answer any questions.