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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

Neither For Nor Against LD 820

*LD 820, Resolve, To Convene a Working Group To Develop Plans To Protect Maine's
Agricultural Lands When Siting Solar Arrays*

April 1, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Nancy McBrady, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources within the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am speaking neither for nor against LD 820, *Resolve, To Convene a Working Group To Develop Plans To Protect Maine's Agricultural Lands When Siting Solar Arrays*.

The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) supports working with stakeholders to address the various issues, concerns, and opportunities presented when considering siting solar projects on agricultural lands. Prime soils and soils of statewide importance are finite and critical natural resources. They are essential to Maine's current and future agricultural productivity, biodiversity, climate resiliency, and food security. We are mindful that land-use changes are happening in Maine and across that country that impact farmland and woodlands. Simultaneously, renewable energy development, including solar development, is key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creates economic benefits in communities throughout the state, and potentially creates an additional revenue stream for farm and forestland owners. Finding the right policies, incentives, and parameters to help balance these interests are critical.

At DACF, we have taken multiple steps to develop and share information with solar developers and landowners to encourage thoughtful siting practices. We have produced a [page](#) dedicated to this topic on our department website and developed the *DACF Technical Guidance for Utility-Scale Solar Installations and Development on Agricultural, Forested, and Natural Lands*. Additionally, in concert with the Governor's Energy Office, the Department of Agriculture will soon be launching a stakeholder group specifically designed to address the issues raised in the Resolve. This effort is an outgrowth of the Maine Climate Council's Climate Action Plan Strategy E, which includes developing policies by 2022 to ensure renewable energy project siting

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is streamlined and transparent while seeking to minimize impacts on natural and working lands and engaging key stakeholders.

This stakeholder group will be composed of a mix of representatives from the following areas: Maine's farming community, renewable energy developers, local municipal officials with solar siting experience, and natural resource-focused service providers. We will also invite the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, the Public Utilities Commission, the Maine Municipal Association, and others. Throughout 2021, the group will meet publicly to define core priorities and principles surrounding agricultural solar siting, identify potential siting mechanisms ranging from guidance, regulations, or other models, consider current use tax program impacts, and identify practical financial incentives to drive appropriate development. The group will synthesize its findings to achieve consensus where possible and report back to this committee on those findings and recommendations.

Given that this effort is soon to commence, we suggest that this Resolve be tabled for a future discussion. We look forward to embarking on this stakeholder process on this critical issue.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have now or at the work session.