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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

In Support of LD 1611

An Act To Amend Maine's Harness Racing Laws Regarding Race Dates and Pari-mutuel Pools

May 4, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Henry Jennings, and I am the Executive Director for the Maine State Harness Racing Commission, speaking in support of LD 1611, *An Act To Amend Maine's Harness Racing Laws Regarding Race Dates and Pari-mutuel Pools*.

LD 1611 contains two separate and distinct proposed amendments to Maine's harness racing statutes. The first section modifies the definition of a commercial track to recognize that there will be times when racing fewer days than the current statutory minimums will be necessary. When the track, the state horsemen's association, and the Commission all agree that fewer race days are in the best interest of the industry, the amendment allows the Commission to authorize a reduction for a particular calendar year. Both 2020 and 2021 have proven to be prime examples of the need for this amendment.

The second component of LD 1611 allows a licensed commercial track to operate a simulcast operation at a satellite location pending Commission approval, provided that the satellite location is within 25 miles of the commercial track and is located in a municipality with a population greater than 55,000.

By statute, the Department is charged with developing policies that will allow harness racing to remain competitive. Consistent with that charge, it is my firm belief the future of Maine harness racing rests squarely on the success of a new commercial track in Southern Maine. Without a new track, it will be extremely difficult to maintain the critical mass of horses and horsemen required to keep our fairs and the Northern Maine track operating. For this reason, I think policies that enhance the economic viability of a new Southern Maine track are crucial to the industry's survival and deserving of support.

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

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