

Testimony of The Maine Municipal Association

Neither For Nor Against

LD 1823- *An Act to Respect and Protect the Right to Food*

May 10, 2023

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Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Pluecker and distinguished members of the Agriculture and Forestry Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am submitting testimony in neither for nor against LD 1823, *An Act to Respect and Protect the Right to Food*, on behalf of Maine Municipal Association which represents the interests of municipal government before the state and federal government. The positions of the Association are formed at the direction of our 70-member Legislative Policy Committee, (LPC) who are elected by the selectboards and council of the municipalities in each of the 35 Senate districts in Maine. As a result, the positions represent a wide view of communities with varying resources, rural and urban, and those with ample local resources as well as those with none.

Municipal officials appreciate that the provisions of this bill explicitly allow a municipality to regulate water use, fertilizer use, pesticide use or control of invasive species which are important not only to protect adjacent farmers, but also to meet their increasingly onerous responsibility to manage the impact of runoff damaging the waters of Maine and federal clean water act stormwater permit requirements that require municipal enforcement to mitigate the chemicals that flow from all adjacent properties and stormwater conveyances in a community.

Officials are concerned about the definition of permaculture as rather than producing more energy than it uses. Permaculture is a method of cultivation that creates an energy loop, not an excess. School farm to kitchen activities are promoted amongst community schools that have volunteers to assist staff and frequently manage garden clubs all over the state. There is nothing in the law that currently prohibits this activity as it largely exists where the is capacity and expertise. Expanding this activity is of value, but rather than create explicit criteria for such curriculum, the unintended consequence may be prohibiting existing garden and farm education programs.

For instance, some schools work with Kindergarteners to plant balsam trees that remain part of their curriculum throughout the years and then are harvested as Christmas trees to fund their middle school graduation trips and celebrations. Other programs include farm to table programs that encourage low maintenance afterschool volunteer activities to grow vegetables for students to take home or provide a meal for the entire school. Overly prescriptive curriculum requirements in the statute favoring one type of farming process over another may limit the learning process and officials think all connections between students and growing food provides value.

Additionally, officials hope that the activity will also support these programs in communities without the local capacity to hire individuals or lack volunteers to deliver these lessons. Officials ask the committee to consider language that promotes farming education in general and supports resources to make that available regardless of local capacity.