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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan in Support of LD 1429, “An Act To Implement the Most Time-sensitive Recommendations of the Maine Climate Council”

May 17, 2021

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. I am Representative Michael Brennan, and I represent District 36, part of the City of Portland. I am here today to speak in support of LD 1429, “An Act To Implement the Most Time-sensitive Recommendations of the Maine Climate Council.”

This bill contains several elements that are relevant to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, where I serve as House chair. Specifically, the sections of this bill that I am referring to are:

- Section 2 - School food purchases
- Section 5 - Local Produce Fund amendments
- Section 11 - Farm-to-school efforts
- Section 15 - \$250,000 appropriation for University of Maine System/Cooperative Extension to establish UMS as coordinating hub for new technology innovation

It is estimated that 1 out of 5 children and in Maine experience food insecurity. Unfortunately, and too often, students come to school hungry and their most consistent source of food is their local school. Consequently, over the past three years, the Committee has been intent on expanding feeding opportunities.

Food that is purchased locally has several advantages. It is fresher, has a smaller carbon footprint and it supports local farmers. I believe there are any number of

opportunities to expand these types of initiatives from pre-K to post-secondary systems in Maine.

We have supported legislation to expand access to before school and after school programs and, at the same time, encouraged the use of farm-to-school efforts. In fact, just last month, we passed legislation submitted to us by Senator Eloise Vitelli that increases incentives for schools to purchase products from local farms.

Also, being from Portland, I would point out that there are a number of possibilities for increasing the amount of fish products that are available to local schools. In recent years, several colleges and universities in Greater Portland have purchased significant amounts of fish products for feeding programs. These efforts have been well received by students who support sustainable food practices.

Again, I would like to again express my support for the initiatives as proposed in LD 1429.