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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

IN SUPPORT OF LD 603

An Act to Ensure That the Exemption of Certain Agricultural Buildings from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code Includes Maple Sugarhouses

March 11, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development (HED), my name is Dr. Mariam Taleb; I am the Farm Viability and Farmland Protection Specialist within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am speaking in support of LD 603, *“An Act to Ensure That the Exemption of Certain Agricultural Buildings from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code Includes Maple Sugarhouses.”*

DACF has testified in the past in support of exempting buildings used to cultivate crops from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code. It is the Department’s position that maple sugar is an agricultural crop and one that is central to Maine’s farming interests and identity. The Department, therefore, believes that maple sugarhouses are already exempted from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code; this bill will provide clarity and consistency in the application of building and energy codes.

DACF’s Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources works closely with Maine’s farms to provide resources such as technical assistance, business support, marketing and promotion, and targeted loan and grant programs. The Bureau is a critical resource for farm businesses facing challenges and barriers to viability. As such, the Bureau continues to hear from farmers that because permitting and assessing agricultural structures is subject to municipal interpretation, agricultural structures are not assessed predictably nor consistently. Farm businesses often operate on small profit margins, so investing in equipment and infrastructure can be challenging. The burden of building permits, site plan reviews, and property taxes exacerbate this challenge, even more so when farms do not expect and cannot plan for certain fees.

This legislation rightly seeks to relieve that challenge for maple sugar producers. However, the Bureau's observations would indicate that this problem is not limited to the maple industry. In

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addition, this bill does not address the concern of many farmers that agricultural buildings exempted from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code are assessed and taxed unequally across municipalities. In testimony submitted to this committee last year, the Department pointed to the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's 2023 Bulletin "[High Tunnels and Greenhouses: A Guide for Municipalities](#)," and stated its position that exemption from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code should inform assessments and that plastic-covered structures, such as high-tunnels and greenhouses should be assessed as equipment or temporary structures, rather than as permanent buildings. The Department continues to hold that position.

The Department strongly supports policies that would provide clarity and create more uniformity in interpreting and enforcing the laws and regulations of the permitting and assessment of agricultural buildings. LD 603 provides this clarity for municipalities permitting maple sugarhouses in Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will be available for a work session if requested.