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130th MAINE SENATE

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**Testimony of Senator Harold “Trey” Stewart
Presenting L.D. 1073, Resolve, Establishing the Commission to Research Effective
Strategies and Efficiencies of Legislatures
Before the State and Local Government Committee
April 21, 2021**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and members of the State and Local Government Committee: I am Senator Trey Stewart and I have the honor of representing 51 communities in Aroostook and Penobscot Counties. I am before you today to present L.D. 1073, Resolve, Establishing the Commission to Research Effective Strategies and Efficiencies of Legislatures.

This bill seeks to address the perennial issues that the legislature continues to grapple with, but does so in a way that avoids partisan slants or political backlash for either side. The bill establishes a commission which will report back to the second session of the 130th legislature with recommendations on the following issues: The overall structure of the Legislature, including the number of Legislators, The Legislative Council, The process for allowing the introduction of bills, The number of bills in a legislative session and biennium, The structure of joint standing committees, The budget process, Legislator term limits, and The legislative pay structure.

Every year that I’ve been in the legislature, we’ve wrestled with at least a few of these ideas, and each year, we determine that nothing should be changed out of fear of one party taking advantage of the other, or the political ramifications that one or any of these changes might have. To be sure, these concerns are getting in the way of us having a real dialogue and thoughtful discussion of these matters and how we operate as a body. From time to time, it’s important for any organization to take a step back, press the pause button, and do an analysis of what aspects of the organization are working well and think about ways to improve. By putting this task in front of a non-biased, non-partisan commission that can do a thoughtful analysis in the interim of the legislature, we will be setting ourselves up for the best chance of success with this goal.

To be sure, we all have thoughts or ideas on how to make this institution run more effectively and efficiently. We probably all have different ideas about what those latter words mean and the implications behind them as well. Perhaps, at the end of the day, the processes and structures we already utilize will prove to be the best for our state. I would wager, however, that there are things we can learn from other state legislatures around the country and the other laboratories of democracy that may be to our benefit. Candidly, I’m not putting this bill forward with any preconceived notion about any of these ideas. I simply would like to know if there can be any consensus around what makes sense and provides for a better process elsewhere and if there’s ways we could be doing our jobs better and thus, being better stewards of the public’s interest.