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To Chairman Dill, Chairman O'Neil and Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry:

As a representative of the Maine Veterinary Medical Association, I am testifying in opposition to LD 95, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to Food.

The intention of the amendment is unclear, except to be designed to opening the door to all manner of animal abuse and neglect in the name of food. The language is overly broad, and the *necessary* protections it seems to be guaranteeing are most certainly addressed elsewhere in the document, without endangering the lives and health of both animals and people.

Food production and access to food is an obviously important part of the Maine economy, and the lives of individual Mainers. Veterinarians in Maine play a critical role in the health of the animal food chain, from both a broad regulatory to an individual animal health view. Our role as veterinarians offers us a unique view into the daily lives of animals raised for meat, eggs, or dairy, and into the challenges faced by owners and caretakers. This amendment seems to be offering protections for animal husbandry practices that may or may not conform to accepted practices, and that lack oversight in favor of protecting the "right" offered herein to "access food." One is left to wonder: Does this mean I can keep a cow in my Portland apartment? Can I slaughter pigs in my front yard? Must I abide by standards and practices for humane processing? Can I house laying hens in my basement?

While in theory raising food animals for one's sole consumption may sound harmless, unhealthy animals and unsafe slaughtering practices have the potential to jeopardize the health of children in the home who eat the meat or animal products, neighbors that the individual shares the meat or animal products with, or any person who unknowingly consumes the meat or animal products. And when a problem with the meat or animal products is identified, it makes identifying all exposed individuals nearly impossible.

MVMA members work tirelessly to ensure Mainers have access to safe food, and that the animals involved in that process are well cared for, properly treated, and healthy themselves. A constitutional amendment worded in this vague manner only impedes those goals. We strongly recommend that this resolution ought not to pass.

Sincerely,

Janelle D. Tirrell, DVM
MVMA Legislative Committee Chair

Katherine Soverel
MVMA Executive Director

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Maine Veterinary Medical Association

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