



## Department of the Secretary of State

Shenna Bellows  
*Secretary of State*

Kate McBrien  
*Maine State Archivist*

### JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### TESTIMONY OF SHENNA BELLOWS, MAINE SECRETARY OF STATE and KATE MCBRIEN, MAINE STATE ARCHIVIST

Neither For, Nor Against

#### L.D. 86, An Act to Restore the Former State of Maine Flag

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government; we are Shenna Bellows, Maine's Secretary of State, and Kate McBrien, Maine's State Archivist. Neither the Department of Secretary of State nor Maine State Archives, which falls under the Department's jurisdiction, have a formal position on L.D. 86. But we believe we have useful information that may assist the committee in its deliberations on this important legislation.

Maine's state flag has undergone changes over the 200 years of our statehood. Perhaps most interestingly, our state did not designate an official flag until 1901, which specified the flag design in question today. We had no official flag for our first almost 100 years of statehood. For an unknown reason, this first official design only lasted 8 years, before legislation changed the flag to its current design in February of 1909. Unfortunately, any record of the debate around the change in flag design did not survive, so we cannot provide any reasoning behind it.

Before 1901, Maine had flags, of course; but most were designed by state and local militias for their individual use. The Seal of the State of Maine, which now graces the blue shield of our current state flag, was designed by a joint legislative committee during the beginning of our statehood. A copy of their report resides in the Maine State Archives, and while a record of their deliberations does not exist, we do have the product. The seal of the state originally was meant as the official mark, the "seal" to represent Maine on official documents. Often affixed to state records with wax, the state seal elevated a document and the action it represented with great solemnity. It appears to have been a common sentiment throughout New England to carry that official seal role onto the state flag. Several neighboring New England states adopted flags like our current one, using their own state seals around 1909 as well.

The original, 1901 flag design is important as a commonly understood symbol of Maine and its connection to New England. The Pine Tree became an early symbol of New England, often viewed as referencing the Tree of Peace as well as New England's, and certainly Maine's, strong timber economy. Colonists used the pine tree symbol commonly on coins and flags throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Leading up to the Revolutionary War, the pine tree became a symbol of colonial unrest and resistance. This common symbol is now proposed as the new license plate design, tying it to the 1901 flag and the symbols of our long and rich history and culture.

Symbolically today, flags remind us of our unity as one people engaged in a common cause, and of surviving difficult struggles together. The design of the flag is made meaningful by the people who embrace it. The lack of debate in the record means we do not know why the flag was changed in 1909, which leaves us only to speculate. But it also frees us to make our own choice for what would be the best and most appropriate flag for the state today. As you deliberate L.D. 86, we believe the history of the proposed and the current flag design may prove useful to you.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have.