



*Senator Mattie Daughtry
Assistant Majority Leader
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0003
Office (207) 287-1515*

***Testimony of Senator Mattie Daughtry introducing
LD 988, Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and
Forestry to Conduct an Accessibility Study of All Maine State Parks and
Historic Sites
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
March 20, 2023***

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Mattie Daughtry, and I proudly represent Senate District 23, which includes Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth. Today I am pleased to introduce my bill LD 988, “Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Conduct an Accessibility Study of All Maine State Parks and Historic Sites.”

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law over 30 years ago, it’s important that we continually work to remove access barriers, which Maine people with disabilities continue to experience at Maine’s state parks and historic sites. In addition to identifying and removing these barriers, it’s critical that the State engage with Maine’s disability community and work on a plan to identify and remove accessibility barriers.

That’s why Disability Rights Maine contacted me and asked that I submit legislation – the bill before you today – to (1) help the State of Maine engage in a meaningful effort to systematically identify barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities in our state parks and state historic sites and (2) develop a plan to address these barriers with input from Mainers with disabilities. LD 988 would require such a survey of state parks and historic sites that could be used to develop a plan to address identified access barriers – with input from the disability community.

Recently, I learned from Andy Cutko with the Bureau of Parks and Lands that Maine conducted an accessibility study in 1996. That independent survey assessed 28 state parks and 14 historic sites. Despite being over 25 years old, it also currently serves as the foundation for ongoing and future accessibility projects. However, today Maine has 32 state parks and 17 historic sites. Four state parks and three state historic sites were not included in that 1996 survey. If the Committee would like, it could request a list of these four state parks and three state historic sites to see if they have been surveyed at a later date. I’d also like to know more about the involvement, if any, of the disability community in the 1996 survey.

Andy also shared with me an overview of the ongoing accessibility projects that have been made possible by a \$50 million allocation from the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan. It's a comprehensive list that, pending contractor and staff availability and approval from the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, includes high, medium, and low priority projects for

- updated bath houses,
- updated entrance booths,
- new visitors centers,
- upgraded boat launches and floats,
- new paving,
- accessible playgrounds,
- new and repaired shelters,
- new residences and officers,
- upgraded paths and walkways.

When I looked at the list, I noticed that no state historic sites were included. Is that because they are too low of priority? Are all state historic sites already accessible and ADA-compliant? Could the \$50 million not be used for state historic sites, but just state parks? I would encourage the Committee to try and find out. We need to ensure that state historic sites, like Fort Baldwin or Fort Edgecomb, are accessible, too. We also need to ensure that not just popular parks and sites get accessibility improvements and upgrades while the less popular parks and sites remain inaccessible. I know that limited funding requires us to pick and choose, but let's figure out how we can make the entire state park and state historic site system accessible. This is vitally important if a disability limits one's mobility so they prefer to visit their local, less popular state park or historic site. Not everyone can live near Crescent Beach or Popham Beach State Park.

It's my understanding that Andy will be offering testimony after me. I think that one concern about the bill is the date. I would be open to moving the date back, since the Bureau has until Dec. 31, 2024 to use up the \$50 million in Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan funds for Maine's state parks. It makes sense to me that we re-assess Maine's state parks and historic sites after ongoing improvements and upgrades have been completed.

I look forward to learning more about how we can work together to ensure that we know all the outstanding accessibility barriers at every Maine state park and historic site and that we engage intentionally, meaningfully, and purposefully with the disability community.

I thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.



Mattie Daughtry

Assistant Senate Majority Leader, Senate District 23

Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth

