



Maine Coast Heritage Trust

A Statewide Land Conservation Organization

Testimony on LD 2214 in support of Section H-26: Nonprofit Sales Tax Exemption

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee; Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and members of the Taxation Committee, my name is Jeff Romano. I appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT) in support of Section H-26 of LD 2214, subsection 120.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust conserves and stewards Maine's coastal lands and islands for their renowned scenic beauty, ecological value, outdoor recreational opportunities, and contribution to community well-being. We provide statewide conservation leadership through our work with land trusts, coastal communities, and other partners. Over the past four decades, we have worked to conserve more than 185,000 acres in Maine.

MCHT and nonprofit land trusts provide invaluable public services to the people of Maine. For example, we conducted a survey in 2019 of more than 80 land trusts located throughout the state and discovered that collectively Maine's land conservation community:

- Maintains more than 1,250 miles of recreational trails for hiking, snowmobiling, mountain biking, and ATV riding;
- Provides public access to over 2.3 million acres for traditional uses, including hunting and fishing;
- Manages over 250 water access sites for recreational boating, swimming, and commercial fishing;
- Conserves more than 2.1 million acres of working forestlands and nearly 40,000 acres of productive farmlands; and
- Offers educational programming each year to about 30,000 students of all ages.

In addition to these highlights, each year Maine's land trusts partner with local governments to improve infrastructure at municipal parks, collaborate with community leaders to enhance water quality, and host a variety of events each year welcoming tens of thousands of people to enjoy the health benefits realized from time spent outdoors. And, despite being eligible for property tax exemption, most land trust conserved lands (more than 94.5%) remain on the local tax rolls to help pay for municipal services.

Despite these clear public benefits, Maine's land trusts fall outside the current list of nonprofits whose activities are eligible for the state's sales tax exemption. LD 2214 would remedy this, by

correctly treating all nonprofits the same. This change could not be timelier as nonprofits take up a growing list of responsibilities once delivered by state, federal, and local governments. For example, amid the recent pandemic, even as some state parks and public lands shut down, land trust preserves welcomed Maine families. We continue to see record numbers of people exploring these wild places near their homes and across the state.