

Leslie Merrill

5 Edgecomb Court

Portland, Maine 04103

Testimony in support of

LD 2258 – An Act to Create an Income Tax Credit for Investments in a
Team’s Qualified Minor League Baseball Facility to Keep the Team in
the State

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, my name is Leslie Merrill and I live in Portland.

My husband and I have been Sea Dogs season ticket holders from the beginning. We share our seats with family and friends and enjoy everything about it in both the good years and the other years.

One year, the Maine Development Foundation put on a presentation by the Sea Dogs management at Hadlock Field. The focus was on the business side of the operation – what their business model was. We expected to hear that first they targeted hard core baseball fans and then everyone else. We learned instead that it was family focused: if you attract the kids, you’ll get the moms, and if you get the moms, the dads are toast! This has worked really well. The ballpark is filled with families, school groups, campers, and other organizations. People come from all over the state. We often meet people who drove an hour or two to see a game. The team has done a very good job of making this a state team and not a Portland team.

We also learned that the business succeeds or fails on the concessions and ticket sales. That makes it critical for them to offer a product that people will not only pay

for but will go out of their way to attend. The margins are thin and the weather is unpredictable.

Obviously the state needs to be careful in its use of tax expenditures, but it is an excellent tool when used well. The Legislature's efforts to ensure accountability and verify promised economic results is important and a critical part of any tax credit. In this case the 90/10 ratio of private investment to public participation seems reasonable. The requirements for employment and on-going commitment to Maine are key. The fact that the improvements will actually belong to the City of Portland as the owner of the facility is an additional benefit.

During the first three decades under local ownership, the Sea Dogs were absolutely committed to the community and to the state. The highlight of that commitment was paying the employees during Covid when no games were played. The new, national corporate owners have spoken of the same community commitment and deferred to the local management team to make local decisions. The fact is, however, that Diamond Baseball Holdings has twenty eight other teams to focus on in addition to us. This modest public commitment will keep them here long enough to see how special this team and its local leadership are and the benefits of keeping the Sea Dogs in Maine. There is a lot of change in minor league baseball right now. As the bill's sponsor said, they may not move but why take the risk.

I appreciate your consideration of my view and encourage you to support this bill.

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LD 2258

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