

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation. My name is Gretchen Spann. I am a resident of Portland. My daughter was the 2010 "Slugger's Kid" - a special title bestowed upon children who have benefited from care at the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital with the Maine Children's Cancer Program. I am testifying today in support of LD 2258.

Like the Sea Dogs, I arrived in Maine in 1994 having dreams of success and a promising future, and I've been reflecting on all that this team and their beloved mascot, Slugger, mean to me, my family, and the state we call home. Looking around the state, Slugger and the Sea Dogs have become a part of the fabric of Maine, like LL Bean and Acadia National Park. They symbolize family time, fun, and the pleasure of a summer day, harkening back to simpler times for many of us. Their presence is felt year round, bringing joy and smiles to children and adults alike.

In a state where people look out for each other, the Sea Dogs have set the bar for community involvement and engagement, supporting youth and family programs across the state. Special events, guests, and theme nights at the ballpark attract fans of all ages, allowing people to collectively enjoy America's pastime in a safe and affordable environment. Periodic appearances from rehabbing Red Sox players are a fun bonus too!

One example of their commitment to community is the support the Sea Dogs and Slugger provide year round to the Maine Children's Cancer Program (MCCP). MCCP is the official charity of the Portland Sea Dogs and over the past 30 years they have helped to raise over \$5 million dollars to support children & families grappling with pediatric cancer and blood disorders across the state.

Our family has experienced the commitment and generosity of the Sea Dogs firsthand; in September 2007 our 4 year old daughter was diagnosed with cancer - she and we were immediately in the fight for her life with the clinical team at Maine Children's Cancer Program managing her care. During the course of her nearly three year treatment she logged many days at the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital, overlooking Hadlock Field- home of the Portland Sea Dogs. Slugger and Sea Dogs players would visit children in the hospital- signing balls, handing out foam fingers, and most importantly bringing laughter, encouragement, and a much needed distraction from chemo, needles, and beeping monitors. Our interactions with Slugger and the Portland Sea Dogs players were a bright spot for our daughter and son during her treatments, and you could see how all the children in the hospital were lifted up by their visits. Once our daughter finished her treatment, she was selected to be the "Slugger kid" in 2010, and she and we spent a year participating in various events with the Sea Dogs to help raise funds and awareness for the Maine Children's Cancer Program by sharing her story.

The Sea Dogs have also been hosting the Mother's Day 5k with the Maine Track Club for over 20 years where they raise funds for the American Cancer Society to support breast cancer related initiatives. The race has become a Mother's Day tradition for many families with carnations presented to all the moms who run, and a special appearance of Slugger's mom. Slugger also makes appearances throughout the year at schools, festivals, and special events

across the state, and just last summer our beloved harbor seal was elected to the Mascot Hall of Fame - the first minor league sports mascot to achieve this honor!

Midway through every Sea Dogs home game, Slugger encourages fans to look up and wave to the kids watching the game from the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital up the hill from the ball field. This is always a touching moment and signals hope for brighter days for the young patients looking out at the games, and a reminder for all to take in the simple joys of each day. Having been on both sides of that wave, it really hits home to be at a Sea Dogs game and see all the fans turn and wave, knowing there are many children above who would give anything to be out of the hospital and sitting at the game.

Families know that they can come and have a fun, safe, affordable time out when they come to a Sea Dogs game. Whether you dance with Slugger to the YMCA, watch him run the bases and usually get beaten by a young fan, or catch a pop fly, it's a great time out- usually capped off with a Sea Dog biscuit. The Sea Dogs also support many local businesses through their concessions that proudly represent many Maine brands.

I believe the community impact of the Portland Sea Dogs is significant and worthy of investment- an investment that will bring returns for years to come for the State of Maine. And the laughter, joy and smiles the Sea Dogs and Slugger bring to children, families and fans are truly priceless.

The Sea Dogs are a fantastic Maine asset, and, for our family, cherished friends. On behalf of my family, and all "Slugger's Kids" we urge you to pass this bill. With the State's help the Sea Dogs can keep kids smiling and fighting for years to come. Thank you.