

160 Fort Road
South Portland, Maine 04106
March 1, 2025

To the members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee
Public Hearing on Monday, March 3, 2025, 10am

I write to you today in support of the bill LD457, An Act to Fund Climate Resiliency Projects Related to the Repair of Campus Infrastructure Used for Active Transportation and Outdoor Recreation”

I arrived on the campus of SMVTI in the fall of 1976 to study Applied Marine Biology and have never left. We live at 160 Fort Road in South Portland, one block from campus. As a work-study student, I maintained the aquarium tanks by carrying water in 5 gallon buckets up the path from Willard Bach to the original Marine Science Building. By the fall of 1978 I had become “Mrs. Fish” of the Mr. and Mrs. Fish Marine Education Program. Together with my husband, Jeff Sandler “Mr. Fish” we established a Marine Science Program that ran on campus for 40 years teaching 1000’s of children from Maine and around the world about the wonders of the ocean. We made the ocean come to life by costuming ourselves as sea creatures. As the children laughed and learned we hoped to create stewards of the ocean for the future.

For 39 of those summers, we ran a day camp affectionately known as “Fish Camp”. The campers explored the tidepools, played capture-the-flag on the top of Fort Preble, walked the green belt, took daily walks to Spring Point Ledge Light and ate lunch along the sea wall between Spring Point Ledge Light and the SMCC dock. In 2014 I served on the committee to rebuild the sea wall. It currently is in dire need of strong grass roots to hold the soil in place behind the wall.

In the last few years, I have watched storm after storm batter the Willard Beach coast taking away the dunes so carefully planted by citizens and the city, also taking away nearly 15 ft of the cliffs that extended out from the Greenbelt Walkway fence towards the ocean. And I’ve seen the waves carry huge granite blocks away from the Fort Preble structure.

The Fort Preble point and the Green Belt Walkway that surrounds it are used daily by hundreds of people as they take their daily walks, and by busloads of tourists as they come to view our lighthouse and the beautiful views of Casco Bay. In 1987 we were married on the point on top of Fort Preble.

This beloved area needs help in reconstruction of the front fortification of Fort Preble, pulling the green belt walkway to a safe distance from the cliffs, rebuilding the fencing and stairs to keep all safe and securing the existing rebuilt sea wall.

Please consider passing this bill so that Fort Preble and the Green Belt Walkway can safely continue to serve the citizens of Maine and all who come to visit this beautiful spot along the coast of Maine.

Thank you,
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