

Testimony of Whitney A. Parrish Perry, Government Relations Director  
American Heart Association

**LD 511, “Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the  
Recommendations of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council”**

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee: My name is Whitney Parrish Perry, and I am the Maine Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke, whose mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. I am writing today to express support of LD 511, which seeks to authorize the development of an interim trail from Portland to Auburn, known as the Casco Bay Trail.

Investing in high-quality pedestrian transportation infrastructure and safe physical fitness opportunities is critical to the well-being of our communities. This project represents an opportunity to improve public health and enhance transportation equity while preserving and utilizing existing infrastructure in a responsible way.

The connection between pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and improved public health is well-established. The creation of safe, accessible trails and paths has been consistently linked to increased physical fitness levels,<sup>1</sup> which in turn helps combat chronic illnesses such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Studies have shown that individuals who live in walkable environments experience lower rates of high body mass index, metabolic syndrome, and other related conditions.<sup>2</sup> Investing in trails is not only an investment in transportation but in preventative health care, reducing long-term medical costs for individuals and our health care system. In fact, a 2009 analysis found that for every dollar spent on trail development, nearly three dollars in direct health benefits could be realized.<sup>3</sup>

Rail trails also provide an accessible and low-impact exercise option for people of all ages and abilities. Walking and cycling on trails reduces joint stress, making them ideal for older adults and individuals recovering from injury. Additionally, regular outdoor physical activity has been linked to improved mental health, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression while enhancing overall well-being and reducing social isolation.<sup>4</sup>

As you know, not all Mainers have the same access to safe and affordable transportation or fitness opportunities. As such, the development of the Casco Bay Trail is an investment in

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<sup>1</sup> Malambo P, Kengne AP, De Villiers A, Lambert EV, Puoane T. Built environment, selected risk factors and major cardiovascular disease outcomes: a systematic review. PLoS One. 2016; 11:e0166846.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Wang G, Macera CA, Scudder-Soucie B, Schmid T, Pratt M, Buchner D. A cost-benefit analysis of physical activity using bike/pedestrian trails. Health Promot Pract. 2005; 6(2):174-9.

<sup>4</sup> Mikkelsen, K., et al. “Exercise and Mental Health: A Review of Neurobiological and Psychological Benefits.” Frontiers in Psychology. 2017.

equity. Those living in rural areas, individuals with disabilities, youth, and lower-income residents are disproportionately impacted by a lack of reliable transportation options. This trail can create new opportunities for active transportation, allowing individuals to commute safely without the financial burden of vehicle ownership. Further, rail trails are proven to increase mobility for individuals with disabilities by providing smooth, accessible paths suitable for wheelchairs, mobility aids, and adaptive cycling.<sup>5</sup>

By supporting LD 511, you are both endorsing a project that promotes physical health and wellness and taking a step toward greater transportation and economic development in Maine. The Casco Bay Trail will offer both residents and visitors a safe and enjoyable way to experience Maine and its natural beauty while staying fit and well. I urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 511.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact me with any questions.

***Respectfully,***

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<sup>5</sup> National Center on Accessibility. “Rail-Trails: Promoting Mobility for all Users.” Indiana University. 2011.