

Stephanie Sienkiewicz
Augusta
LD 29

My name is Stephanie Sienkiewicz. I currently serve as an At-Large City Councilor in Augusta and I am writing in support of LD 29.

My community has seen the benefits of the Kennebec Rail Trail for many years now - on any given day, you can find dozens of people on the trail spanning all age ranges. My husband and I have walked from Augusta to Hallowell on a date night, stopping at various establishments in both towns along the way. I have brought my children on stroller walks and bike rides, meeting up with other parents of young children to enjoy some time together, exercising and enjoying our beautiful river. The community reaps so much benefit from our little slice of trail in so many ways - physical health, mental health, economic activity, and community bonds, just to name a few. I wholeheartedly want the same for our sister communities along the entire trail system.

I also see additional benefit for Augusta. Increasing opportunities for residents and tourists to enjoy more of our communities through a highly connected, accessible, and well-maintained trail system helps everyone. I imagine daily use and also the capacity for larger events, with planned activities along the entire trail. What an opportunity we have before us - let's not let it go to waste.

I happened to open the news just prior to writing this testimony and noted the headline indicating that 6 pedestrians have died already this year in Maine. While opening trails such as this won't solve all of the transportation issues involved in these accidents and deaths, elevating the needs of walkers, runners, and bikers is a part of the solution. It is long past time to incorporate and prioritize these methods of travel. I believe when we prioritize spaces that are intended for non-vehicular movement, such as the proposed Merrymeeting Trail, we move toward a safer world for everyone who wants to recreate and move in these ways.

I appreciate the work of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council and urge this committee to enact their recommendations. In a time when opportunities for recreation are in high demand, communities are searching for ways to broaden their connections, and "alternate" modes of transportation are increasingly popular, adopting LD 29 just makes sense. For all the reasons above, I ask this committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 29.

Thank you for your time and consideration.