



Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Support of

LD 29: Resolve, to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council

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

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
State House, Room 216
Tuesday, March 4, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. MPHA supports LD 29: “Resolve, to Require the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Council” and LD 511: “Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council.”

MPHA is the state’s oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 850 individual members and 70 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to advance the health of all people and places in Maine. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine’s communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

LD 29 would authorize the 26-mile Merrymeeting Trail from Brunswick to Gardiner and LD 511 would authorize the 72-mile Casco Bay Trail from Portland to Auburn.

Data show that 75% of children aged 6-17 years old in Maine are considered physically inactive; nearly a quarter of adults in Maine are also physically inactive.¹ Physical inactivity – or sedentary time – is its own risk factor for poor health, including increased risk for cancer, type 2 diabetes, anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. Research also shows that determinants of inactivity include urbanization patterns and increased technology use. Unsurprisingly, determinants of increased activity include land use mix, connectivity and population density, and overall neighborhood design – including access to safe spaces to recreate. People need easily accessible infrastructure to stay active – and if the infrastructure is there, people will take advantage of it.

As one example, on February 27, 2025, we [published an episode](#) of our podcast, [Healthy Maine Talks](#), about the Penobscot River Trails in Grindstone, and heard from folks who were recreating there about the health benefits of using the trails. More than 400 studies support positive associations between time in nature and health, including reduced stress, anxiety, depression, blood pressure, and even aggression. Other associations include improved cognitive function, sleep, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. While these improvements are important for individual and community health; they can also help build land stewards and conservation advocacy networks. These psychosocial and engagement benefits can help us prepare and respond to climate change, promote fairness in trail use, and improve community and psychological resilience. Research also

shows that spending 120 minutes – or 2 hours – outside each week can lead to these improvements. It doesn't matter whether the 120 minutes is one long trip, or several shorter visits to nature.

These interim trails will increase access to safe, outdoor recreational spaces, thereby improving public health, protecting the environment, and providing safe active transportation options for people who don't drive, or simply want to drive less. They can also serve as destinations for others to visit and support the local economy. We strongly support these bills and respectfully request you vote LD 29 and LD 511 "Ought to Pass." Thank you for your consideration.

¹ America's Health Rankings. 2023. Physical inactivity in Maine.
<https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/Sedentary/ME>.