

James McCarthy
Brunswick
LD 735

To: Sen. Carney, Rep. Doudera, and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Re: Support for LD 735, An Act to Protect Sand Dunes on Sears Island and to Establish Criteria for Legislation Regarding Land Development

My name is James McCarthy and I am a retired journalist who lives in Brunswick. I appreciate this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of LD 735. I have also submitted written testimony in support of another bill related to Sears Island: LD 226, An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in Searsport by Extending Conservation Easement Projections.

I defer to people more knowledgeable than I am about the sand dunes on Sears Island, their importance as a habitat, and their relationship to the causeway, which I understand might well be an even-more important environmental issue to be looked at ... with a goal of restoring natural water circulation in the bay surrounding Sears Island. I also would refer you to my LD 226 letter outlining my reasons for why the Mills' Administration's proposed wind port for Sears Island should not proceed.

I support this bill chiefly because it calls for the inclusion of tribal representatives from each of the Wabanaki Nations in any future discussions related to any land development on Sears Island. In my view, this is an incredibly important acknowledgment that the Wabanaki Nations should be invited to the table, precisely because their perspectives about the place we call Sears Island go back at least 3,400 years ago and possibly longer. They are the ones who used the island as a base for hunting and fishing. They are the ones who named it "Wassumkeag," place of the "bright sand beach," a defining characteristic that was a navigational aid for ancestral Wabanaki canoeists paddling routes that extended along the entire coast of what is now called Maine. They are the ones who have lived here for more than 10,000 years, yet, for much of the past 500 years, their voices have been stifled, their place-based wisdom largely ignored and often erased. Including their perspectives in discussions about Sears Island, I hope, will begin to heal longstanding divisions that historically have treated the Wabanaki as if they were invisible.

Although this bill limits the Wabanaki representatives to the question of whether Sears Island "contains a site sacred to Indigenous people in Maine," I see it as an important first step that might lead to an expanded Wabanaki role in future land-use decisions throughout Maine. I sincerely believe that we need the Wabanaki people's wisdom, not just regarding the place they named Wassumkeag but also regarding the homeland they know as "Dawnland," which we now call Maine.

I urge the committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 735 and continue to support it as it makes its way through the Legislature.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

James McCarthy