

**Testimony of Maria Fuentes
Maine Better Transportation Association**

Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

*LD 226, An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in
Searsport by Extending Conservation Easement Protections.*

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

March 12, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, I am Maria Fuentes, a resident of Hallowell and Executive Director of the Maine Better Transportation Association. MBTA is a coalition of firms, organizations, and individuals who plan, design, build, and maintain the state's transportation infrastructure system. We are testifying in opposition to both LD 226 and LD 735.

Searsport, along with Eastport and Portland, is part of the state's "Three Port Strategy," Maine's long-term maritime plan to concentrate state investments in our limited deep-water ports. Sears Island was purchased by Maine taxpayers for the MaineDOT to use for transportation purposes, specifically a marine cargo port.

To that end, MaineDOT built a causeway in the 1990's connecting the island to the mainland. Why did they build a causeway? Because Maine citizens had approved funding to build a port. At the time, a couple of people with summer homes did not want their view tainted by a working port, so they joined forces with the Sierra Club and others to file lawsuits and otherwise delay the project, intending to prohibit any port development on the island. But once people had easy access to the island, some considered it their own playground. Ironically, marine transportation is often the most efficient and cleanest form of shipping freight. But that did not seem to matter if it meant their view was obstructed by a working waterfront.

Fast forward to 2005 when Governor Baldacci created a Sears Island Planning Initiative Steering Committee to suggest the best uses of the island. A majority of the committee, which was stacked with people opposing a port, agreed to set aside two-thirds of the island for conservation and retain one-third for transportation. MBTA was part of the original committee, but not a signatory to the agreement because too many participants made clear they wanted the entire island conserved.

For many, LD 226 seems to be more about stopping ocean wind than enhancing conservation. But now, others who signed on to the agreement to split up the island are using the cover of ocean wind to opportunistically return for the remaining third.

If the state wants to have a legitimate discussion about offshore wind, then let's have that conversation. There are other ways to voice opposition to ocean wind without overturning the wishes of Maine people or ignoring an agreement reached less than two decades ago to ensure our state can maximize the economic potential of one of the state's deepest ports.

Please vote Ought not to Pass on LD 226 and LD 735.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important transportation matter and for the important work your committee is doing throughout the session.