



A Journey from Curiosity to Connection

April 10, 2025

Testimony in support of LD 762 - An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for the Maintenance, Preservation and Promotion of State Historic Sites

Dear members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

Thank you for the important and challenging work you are doing. As you carefully consider so many competing needs for our state, I ask you to please support LD 762 - An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for the Maintenance, Preservation and Promotion of State Historic Sites. This bill will fund (pending voter approval of the bond issue) the essential care, preservation, and promotion of Historic Sites that are owned by the state but have long been underfunded or not funded at all.

As the Executive Director of the Wilson Museum, one of Castine's outstanding history museums, as a member of Maine's Semiquicentennial Commission, and as a member of the planning team for the Downeast Maine National Heritage Area, I cannot overstate the importance of place-based learning and the impact that historic spaces like Fort George here in Castine can have on our state's identity and civic discourse. Historic sites are also strong drivers of sustainable tourism, which is a key goal for Maine's first National Heritage Area here in Downeast Maine.

Fort George, in Castine, is an absolute jewel. Built by the British during the Revolutionary War in 1779, Fort George is the best-preserved example of a British built earthwork fortification in all North America. Castine was the site of The Penobscot Expedition, a critical battle during the Revolutionary War. The Fort has the potential to draw many tourists who travel to see Revolutionary War Sites, bringing revenue to Castine and other Maine communities.

At one time Castine received funds from the state for grounds maintenance. These funds were discontinued under a previous administration, and we have found it more and more difficult to care for this important structure using best historic preservation practices. In addition, there are currently safety hazards that must be remediated before we seek to promote tourism.

A few years ago, several entities in the town of Castine applied for and received a grant to plan for the preservation and interpretation of Fort George. We began the work with



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a study to assess our needs; now we need your assistance to make the Fort a key part of Maine's Revolutionary War story and a huge tourism draw.

LD 762 has the potential to:

- make the Fort safe for visitors,
- invest in interpretive signage and
- create a plan to incorporate the Fort more fully into our historic tours and events.

This is the perfect time to invest in a Revolutionary War Fort with the upcoming commemoration of America's 250th Anniversary and the American Revolution. This is the perfect time to feature Fort George as a major tourism draw.

The people of Castine are proud of our history, the role our town played in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, as well as our strong history of shipbuilding. We work hard to promote our history and the history of Maine to residents and visitors. We, in Castine, and the 19 other towns with state historic sites, are looking to you to support LD 762. We cannot do the work on our own - please help us!

As a leader in Castine's cultural community and a member of Maine's America 250th Commission, I invite you to visit Castine and to tour Fort George. We can show you the safety issues and our plans for interpretive signage. We would be honored to give you a tour and to thank you personally for your assistance.

Again, thank you for the work you are doing and for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia Gray".

Julia Gray, Executive Director