

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD1957

To be delivered over Zoom on May 13, 2025

My name is Desi Van Til, and I am a screenwriter and producer living in Portland. Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier and members of the committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of LD1957.

I was raised in Farmington, a proud Mt. Blue High School graduate. Having studied English literature at Princeton, and been awarded a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship to Paris to represent my home state, and then having worked in LA as an executive for a film production company, I wrote a screenplay for a film entitled *Tumbledown*.

My husband, director Sean Mewshaw and I moved from Los Angeles to Maine to make our first feature in the place where it was set, and then Senator Janet Mills wrote a bill using *Tumbledown* as a pilot project for an incentive that would have made it possible for us to shoot in the place that inspired me to write it, and where we would have been thrilled to spend the four plus million dollar budget, infusing the local economy with money, and highlighting the natural beauty of Western Maine.

But because this legislation did not pass, despite the script being tailored to specific locations in Farmington, Wilton and Weld, our financiers demanded we produce the film in a state offering incentives of at least 25%. Sean and I stood before caucuses in the State House in Augusta eighteen years ago, imploring lawmakers that if we want to grow a film industry in this gorgeous, cinematic state, we need a competitive incentive. However, like so many other films set here, our movie, which employed hundreds of people and poured millions of dollars into local economies, didn't have a 'Maine in Maine' logo emblazoned in its credits because it was shot in Concord, Mass. And though I'd rather you take my word for it as lived experience, the data from the Olsberg Report clearly demonstrates that our meager film incentives are ineffectual both in attracting larger studio productions or fostering a homegrown film industry. Having been appointed to the Film Commission by Governor Mills in 2023, I am proud that our dedicated work has been reflected in Representative Copeland's thoughtful bill.

Now Sean and I are working on another Maine-based film, this one set Downeast. It is written and directed by us, two Maine residents. The story celebrates Maine's heritage craft of wooden boatbuilding. Its crew and many cast will be filled with Mainers of all stripes who want the opportunity to work on a professional feature film crew. The incentives proposed in Representative Copeland's bill would be game-changing for our production, and likewise game-changing for all filmmakers who want to make movies in the place where they belong. Thank you for your consideration.

Desi Van Til
Portland
LD 1957

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