



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

Neither For Nor Against LD 791

An Act to Support the Maintenance of Historic Fort George in Castine

March 13, 2023

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Andy Cutko, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) neither for nor against LD 791, An Act to Support the Maintenance of Historic Fort George in Castine.

Fort George was built in 1779 as part of an initiative by the British to establish a new colony during the Revolutionary War. The British subsequently re-occupied Castine in the War of 1812, re-establishing Fort George and creating smaller forts around it. The remains of the fort now consist primarily of earthworks, and the site's maintenance and preservation require an infusion of funding.

The site is managed through a 42 year-old agreement between the Bureau of Parks and Lands and the Town of Castine, and this agreement calls for the state to fund the site's major repairs "within the limits of available funding." Unfortunately, funding for the Bureau's Historic Sites has been extremely limited over the years, and the Bureau has directed such funding to Historic Sites with immediate structural needs and high public use, such as Colonial Pemaquid. An independent assessment in 2021 identified a number of next steps regarding design, maintenance, and project oversight.

Over the past few weeks, the Department has met a few times with Senator Grohoski and other legislators, the Town of Castine, and the Castine Historical Society to discuss the site's needs and explore opportunities for addressing them. Among other points of concurrence, we all recognize that the 1981 agreement needs to be updated and refreshed to reflect today's priorities and limitations.

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As the Committee reviews this bill, I encourage you to consider the singular focus on Fort George. While the Bureau would welcome earmarked funds for one of our 48 State Parks or Historic Sites, we have numerous Historic Sites in need of significant funding, and the Committee should be aware of a precedent that might be set by funding specific sites one at a time rather than a more holistic approach to funding these sites.

I am glad to answer questions here or at the work session.