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Testimony of Rep. Ron Russell cosponsoring

**LD 791, An Act to Support the Maintenance of Historic Fort George
in Castine**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Ron Russell and I represent House District 17, the towns of Bucksport, Orland, Penobscot, and my hometown of Verona Island. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of **LD 791, An Act to Support the Maintenance of Historic Fort George in Castine**, which I am pleased to cosponsor.

I grew up in Penobscot and when I was 10, we moved to Castine. Fort George was just up the street from my house. I studied about Fort George at the Adams School on the town common. My first "paycheck job" was the summer of 1964 when I turned 15, and my employer was the State of Maine. I worked on the archaeological dig and restoration of the bastion in the southeast corner of the fort. The work was hard, but exciting. When I turned 15 in mid-July, I got to work on the sifter and found things like pieces of clay pipes, musket balls, interesting metal objects, a couple of coins, and a button from a British redcoat soldier with the number of his regiment on it.

We were the talk of the town that summer and everyone was looking forward to the state's interest and future support of one of Maine's most historic forts in one of Maine's most historic towns. Early in our country's history, Castine was a strategic location situated at the mouth of the Penobscot and Bagaduce Rivers. The land was inhabited first by Native American tribes, and then the Dutch, French, British, and finally our young American nation. Fort George was built by the British in 1779 and played a key role in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. It played a part in the Penobscot Expedition, which included the largest assembled fleet of

American vessels in the Revolution, and its defeat marked the worst disaster in American Naval history prior to Pearl Harbor.

Fort George is a Maine Historic Site and is owned by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands (MBPL). It is on the National Registry of Historic Places, and in another twist, it figures prominently in the history of baseball. It holds a significant place in both American and Maine history.

Yet over the years, due to lack of any funding from the state, much of the work that was done in the sixties has deteriorated. The general condition of the fort has suffered over time. While its plight may not be unique when compared to other Maine Historic Sites, it does have many reasons beyond its significant history to find funding to preserve Fort George.

Through a grant from the US Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, a comprehensive Historic Properties Management Plan (HPMP) was completed in September 2021. The development of the plan brought many stakeholders together, including the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the Town of Castine, the Castine Historical Society, the Wilson Museum, and the Friends of Castine Fortifications. The crucial element of shared funding is the next step to preserve and protect Fort George's integrity and archaeological resources for generations to come. These stakeholders (Friends of the Fort) are ready to make sure that the fort is saved for future generations and that is what makes any investment in Fort George a good one, and sets it apart.

The irony of my first real employer in 1964 being the State of Maine at the minimum wage of \$1.15/hour in a job I loved, to now working in job that most likely will be my last, again for the State of Maine, which I've got to say, I also love, is not lost on me. New wages aside. So for me, this gives real symmetry to being here today and testifying on behalf of Fort George in Castine.

I would be glad to take any questions.