



Department of the Secretary of State

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Secretary of State

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Maine State Archivist

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

TESTIMONY OF SHENNA BELLOWS, MAINE SECRETARY OF STATE and KATE MCBRIEN, MAINE STATE ARCHIVIST

Testifying in Favor

L.D. 1029, “Resolve, to Establish a Commission to Commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of the United States”

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government; we are Shenna Bellows, Maine’s Secretary of State, and Kate McBrien, Maine’s State Archivist. The Department of Secretary of State and the Maine State Archives, which falls under the Department’s jurisdiction, support L.D. 1029.

This resolve establishes a commission to help Maine residents commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation. This will bring us in line with the other states who already have Commissions in place and are actively planning statewide programs and events. One goal of the federal-level America250 commission is to inspire and encourage Americans to connect to the past to inspire the future. That would be a goal for the State of Maine as well.

Our state recently tried to commemorate our own bicentennial but was disrupted by the global pandemic. As a result, Maine residents were not able to fully participate in programs exploring our state history. Through the America250 program, we have a chance to commemorate the events which led to the creation of our nation in connection with the role residents of the then Province of Maine and the Wabanaki tribes played in our nation’s founding.

This Resolve works to improve on the model set by the Maine Bicentennial Commission, by building a Commission consisting of members with specific expertise and placing that Commission within the Department of the Secretary of State. Specifically, the Commission would be housed within the Maine State Archives, rooting it in history. The Maine State Archives has requested a limited-period position to administratively support this Commission and work to coordinate meaningful programs throughout the state. That position is part of our biennial budget request currently under consideration and would truly work together with this bill.

Maine history is deeply entwined with the founding of our nation. Many Americans know that the American Revolution began with the first shots fired in Lexington and Concord in April of 1775. But how many are aware that the first naval battle of the war took place in Maine, when in June 1775 the citizens of Machias captured the British ship, *Margaretta*? That same year, Benedict Arnold led an expedition up the Kennebec River to defeat the British at Quebec.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1776, he listed the reasons that the thirteen colonies should separate from the British Empire. One of those reasons was **“He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.”** “Burnt our towns” refers to the burning of Portland (then called Falmouth) by the British Navy in 1775. When the Declaration of Independence was completed, printed broadsides of it were sent to towns throughout the colonies, including Maine towns, to spread the word. Two of those broadsides are stored at the Maine State Archives.

In 1779, the largest naval battle of the American Revolutionary War took place in mid-coast Maine, when the Americans sent nineteen warships and twenty-five support vessels to Penobscot Bay to reclaim Maine from the British, who had captured it a month earlier and renamed the area “New Ireland.”

Most significantly, America won our Revolutionary War with great support and assistance of the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Nations, each of whom sent brave and determined heroes to fight in the war.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have.