

TESTIMONY OF DAVID BRAGDON

In SUPPORT of L.D. 2258, An Act to Create an Income Tax Credit
for Investments in a Team's Qualified Minor League Baseball Facility to Keep
the Team in the State

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation
Thursday, March 14, 2024

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and members of the Taxation Committee, my name is David Bragdon. I am a Portland resident, a long-suffering Boston Red Sox fan and, for the past 10 years, an usher at the Portland Sea Dogs games. I am here today to testify in strong and enthusiastic support of L.D. 2258 and to share with the committee a personal view of what this team means to the fans, what it contributes to the community, and how it acts as a tourism magnet for the entire state.

Those of us who work as ushers interact with hundreds of people every game. Over the course of 72 games in a season that stretches from April to September, we talk with thousands of fans and many of them share with us what the team means to them.

The season opens with an invitation to schools across the state to nominate students for Most Improved Student awards. Over the first part of the season hundreds of students from Fort Kent to Kittery come to the park and are recognized on the field for their achievement. Parents often mention how important that recognition is for their child, often because these kids have struggled to overcome obstacles on their way to success.

The Sea Dogs also invite school teams, Little Leagues and rec programs to attend games and be recognized on the field for their achievements. Speaking with their coaches, we hear how valuable it is for kids to see professional athletes, to be inspired to aspire, and to get them excited about being a member of a team and participating in a sport. Too many kids these days are uninvolved in organized activities, particularly sports. The Sea Dogs serve as a role model and fosters enthusiasm for team sports.

The value of the Sea Dogs as a tourism magnet is apparent to anyone who spends time at Hadlock Field. The team attracts a following from around the state. It's not just a destination for southern Maine residents. I have season ticket holders who travel from Penobscot, Somerset, Kennebec, Sagadahoc, Oxford and York counties. The game is enjoyed by a very broad representation of fans from around the state.

As ticket prices at Fenway Park have increased, we are seeing an increasing number of families from around New England traveling to the park. Every game I have Red Sox fans from New Hampshire and Massachusetts sitting in my section, because they've learned that it's cheaper to spend a day in Portland with the family, dine out and catch a Sea Dogs game, than buy 4 tickets at Fenway.

These families and other vacationing summer tourists often ask for our recommendations about restaurants, sightseeing trips and activities to do around the state of Maine.

The Sea Dogs are a valuable draw for out-of-state tourists and a source of revenue for both Portland and the State. But now the team is faced with a costly mandate from Major League Baseball to upgrade its facilities or risk losing its minor league franchise.

Hadlock Field is owned by the city of Portland, and the city's lease with the Sea Dogs calls for the city to maintain the field to major league standards. Upgrading the field to meet the new requirements should be a city responsibility. If the city can't commit the financial resources necessary, the question arises who shall fund the project.

L.D. 2258 is designed to support the Sea Dogs' effort to construct the facilities required by MLB before the 2025 deadline. It's a well-designed tax credit, providing modest support, with conditions that require the team to remain in Portland over the 5 years for which the tax credit is available.

This is a sound public policy approach. It recognizes the value of the team to the state as an important tourism attraction. And it pragmatically acknowledges the impact of what occurs when communities fail to maintain professional sports stadiums. The Pawtucket Sox lost their team to Hardford when the city failed to invest in needed ballpark renovations. And the Trenton Thunder in New Jersey lost their double-A Yankees affiliate to neighboring Bridgewater, NJ, in 2020 when Major League Baseball acquired the Eastern League in which the Sea Dogs play.

Trenton offers a particularly cautionary note to those who might take the Sea Dog's presence in Portland for granted, because the stadium president announced a few months ago that they are doing everything possible to lure another minor league team back to Trenton. It's important to recognize that professional sports venues are constantly in competition with one another, and that no team has the luxury of thinking that it's insulated from this competition.

I encourage the committee to recognize the value of having a professional sports franchise in Portland, to support this reasonable, tightly-construed tax credit and to approve LD 2258. Thank you.