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***Testimony of Representative Ed Crockett in Support of
LD 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
Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation***

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation. I'm Ed Crockett and I have the honor of serving as the Representative for House District 112 which is part of Portland and part of Falmouth. I am here today in support of LD 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."

Passage of the bill will support the necessary upgrades required by Major League Baseball to the Portland Sea Dogs' facility. There is a great sense of urgency here since the deadline for the upgrade is next April. I'm not pleased with the short deadline imposed by Major League Baseball, however the impact to the Southern Maine community could be catastrophic. I really don't think that's hyperbole. Understand, if the upgrades are not met, the team risks relocation. In my opinion, this would be a tragedy. But, it's preventable.

Maine and Greater Portland has been the ideal home for minor league sports. There's simply not enough people to support a major league franchise, but our population and passion for sports is the perfect fit for minor leagues clubs. I'm old enough to remember when the Maine Mariners (an AHL hockey team) came to town in 1977. It helped revitalize the community. A few years later, in 1993, the Sea Dogs arrived and it's been a love affair with the community ever since (especially after partnering with the Red Sox). And only 15 years ago, the Maine Red Claws, now the Maine Celtics, planted roots in southern Maine. All these teams draw big crowds, cementing the fact that little 'ole Maine is one of the best, if not the best, minor league sports state.

Still, there is no denying that the Sea Dogs, with Slugger leading the charge, is the top draw. Mainers love their baseball. Most of us (not Yankee fans) went nuts when the Curse of the Bambino was finally broken in 2004. For years the University of Maine was a regular at the College World Series, and the whole city of Westbrook (only five miles from Hadlock Field) shut down when their boys of summer made it to the Little League World Series a few years back. Mainers love their baseball, and honestly it angers me that we are in this position.

District 112: Portland (Part), Falmouth (Part)

There's no doubt that Hadlock Field needs an upgrade. There's also no doubt that MLB has the resources to cover those expenses. Unfortunately, that's not how it works.

Minor league baseball franchises are in high demand. And even though we regularly sit at the top of minor league baseball in attendance figures, it, like too many things, comes down to money. If we don't chip in and support the franchise, I'm pretty sure another small city will step in and make MLB an offer it can't refuse. I never imagined the Pawtucket Red Sox, an institution in Rhode Island, would be courted away by Worcester, MA. But that's what happened. I'd hate to see the Sea Dogs in Manchester, Nashua, or even Pawtucket.

If we opt to play their bluff, sadly, I think there's a real good chance we'll be the ones crying in our Sea Dog biscuits.

Think about what the community loses without this franchise. Having lived in Portland for most of my 62 years, I've seen first-hand how these franchises have brought families together. Maine is small, and there really aren't that many fun, safe, family-friendly outlets to enjoy. The Sea Dogs fans and season ticket holders range from Kittery to Augusta and even beyond. This is entertainment that the whole state experiences.

Some food for thought: The old saying "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" comes to mind when looking at our options. Wouldn't it be better to stop something bad from happening (like losing the team) than to deal with the loss after it's gone?

Passing this bill is a key component in the negotiation process. Let's keep ourselves in play, and the team for years to come.