



Rachel Talbot Ross
Senator, District 28

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

***Testimony of Senator Rachel Talbot Ross introducing
LD 243, “Resolve, to Name a Railroad Crossing in Wiscasset the James Weldon
Johnson Crossing”***

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
March 4, 2025*

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Senator Rachel Talbot Ross, and I represent Senate District 28 which includes part of Portland and Peaks Island. I am honored to present LD 243, which would permanently designate the railroad crossing at mile marker 49.10 on Main Street in Wiscasset as the James Weldon Johnson Crossing.

James Weldon Johnson was an exceptional American — a patriot who dedicated his life to advancing the principles of democracy, justice, and equality both at home and abroad. His contributions to our nation were profound, spanning law, diplomacy, education, literature, and the arts. As a civil rights leader, he fought tirelessly to protect voting rights, end racial violence, and ensure that America lived up to its founding ideals.

Johnson was born in 1871 and became a man of character, intellect, and talent. He became the first Black attorney admitted to the Florida Bar since Reconstruction while also serving as a school principal. As a U.S. diplomat under President Theodore Roosevelt, he represented American ideals on the world stage, promoting democracy and international cooperation.

Johnson’s literary and musical contributions remain an enduring part of his legacy. His poem “*Lift Every Voice and Sing*,” written to commemorate Abraham Lincoln’s birthday, was later set to music by his brother and has since been embraced as a powerful anthem of resilience, faith, and unity.

His death in 1938, in a tragic automobile accident at the very railroad crossing in Wiscasset that this bill seeks to name in his honor, was felt across the country. More than two thousand people gathered for his funeral, a testament to his profound impact on the nation. His legacy continues to inspire generations of Americans who believe in the promise of our founding principles and the work required to achieve them.

In preparation for this legislation, I contacted the MaineDOT to understand any requirements or considerations for naming infrastructure, which many of you on the committee likely know well. MaineDOT has confirmed:

- Their only requirement for naming infrastructure is for the Legislature to direct them. While they do not take positions on naming bills, they will submit neutral testimony explaining whether they have records of any previous legislatively designated names.



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- This would be the first time a railroad crossing in Maine has been named through legislation. While many roads and bridges have been named in honor of individuals, MaineDOT has indicated they would view this as similar to other transportation infrastructure dedications.
- No funding is required for this designation. MaineDOT will provide and install the necessary signage at their own cost, using existing resources.
- The anticipated timeline is shortly after the conclusion of the legislative session, when MaineDOT sends out all naming bills to their regional offices. At that point, a Dig Safe review will be conducted before the signs are installed.

In closing, by supporting LD 243, we affirm James Weldon Johnson's connection to Maine and honor his extraordinary contributions to our nation. Naming this crossing won't change history, but it acknowledges it in a way that matters. I urge the committee's support, and I welcome any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rachel Talbot Ross".

Rachel Talbot Ross
State Senator, District 28
Representing part of Portland and Peaks Island