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THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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***Testimony of Senate Assistant Majority Leader Jill C. Duson presenting
L.D. 511, Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the
Recommendations of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
March 4, 2025***

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Jill Duson. I serve as the Senate Assistant Majority Leader, representing Senate District 27, which is part of the cities of Portland and Westbrook. I am pleased to be here before your committee today to present my bill, L.D. 511, Resolve, to Direct the Department of Transportation to Implement the Recommendations of the Portland to Auburn Rail Use Advisory Council.

L.D. 511 grants legislative approval for the conversion of the Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor into a paved or gravel bicycle and pedestrian trail, as a majority of the Rail Use Advisory Council members voted for. This rail corridor, last active in 2015 due to economically unviable, spans 26.5 miles throughout state-owned land, running through 8 cities and towns, with approximately 15,000 Mainers living within a half-mile radius.

With the support of this committee, our region would see significant economic, environmental, and health benefits from multi-use trails. Maine's Eastern Trail, a scenic 65+ mile trail, generates nearly **\$44 million in economic impact** with that money staying locally and traveling to neighboring towns and local economies. Analysis of the Berlin Subdivision Corridor estimates between \$3-\$5 million annually, based solely on consumer spending. Better yet, this resolve requires no funding. In December 2024, the Auburn City Council passed a resolution endorsing this exact proposal before us today.

As a member of Portland Trails, I've seen firsthand the impact and benefits trails bring to our communities. Not only is it a safe place to recreate and exercise, but you're bound to run into neighbors, meet old and make new friends. It's another opportunity to enjoy Maine's outdoors, which in this day in age, is something we should all strive for more of. I am glad to be working with my colleagues in a bipartisan manner to further our communities' connection in a meaningful way.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this bill. You will also hear from advocates who are here today to share their perspective. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.