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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in Searsport by Extending Conservation Easement Protections; and An Act to Protect Sand Dunes on Sears Island and to Establish Criteria for Legislation Regarding Land Development

L.D. 226 AND L.D. 735

**GOVERNOR'S ENERGY OFFICE
March 12, 2025**

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources Committee (ENR): My name is Celina Cunningham, and I am the Deputy Director of the Governor's Energy Office (GEO).

The GEO testifies in opposition to L.D. 226 and L.D. 735.

Offshore wind remains an important energy source as part of the diverse portfolio of resources under development to address Maine's energy needs over the long term, as outlined in the Maine Energy Plan. GEO developed the Energy Plan, which is informed by a comprehensive Technical Report and more than a year of stakeholder engagement, and outlines a comprehensive approach to meet statutory requirements and state goals, including the requirement that 80% of electricity used in Maine must be supplied by renewable resources by 2030, the goal of 100% clean energy by 2040, and target of 30,000 clean energy jobs by 2030. For decades, Maine has experienced significant energy cost volatility due to overdependence on out-of-state fossil fuels to heat homes and power the economy. The Energy Plan sets us on a path to provide more affordable, reliable, and increasingly clean energy for Maine people and businesses. Offshore wind is a key energy generation resource, along with other clean resources and storage, to advance that pathway. With increasing energy needs for the power sector as the economy transitions to electrification, as called for by the Energy Plan and *Maine Won't Wait*, Maine is dedicated to continuing the advancement of long-term planning activities necessary to support infrastructure needed to meet the state's needs and to procure up to 3,000 megawatts of offshore wind by 2040 as directed by the Maine Legislature.

Maine has made significant investments in advancing offshore wind to date. In 2019, the state launched the Maine Offshore Wind Initiative, which is engaged in offshore wind planning, research, infrastructure development, and policy. In 2023, after an 18-month stakeholder process, GEO published the *Maine Offshore Wind Roadmap* (the Roadmap), a strategic plan with key actions to advance a responsible offshore wind industry in Maine that maximizes the benefits of offshore wind for Maine while protecting existing ocean users and the Gulf of Maine ecosystem. The Roadmap identified milestones to unlock Maine's opportunity to leverage offshore wind to create good-paying jobs, spur broad economic development, and create abundant clean electricity to stabilize energy costs and reduce reliance on imported fossil fuels. Among the priorities of the Roadmap are advancing crucial research topics, the

development of state energy procurement, and the need for an offshore wind port, which is critical to lowering costs and realizing the associated economic development benefits.

Following the completion of the Roadmap, the state has worked to advance several key priorities in coordination with local, state, and federal partners. GEO has worked in partnership with the Maine Department of Transportation to advance port planning. GEO has also worked to begin planning the necessary components associated with the Maine Research Array and the commercial solicitation process, including the release of a Request for Information. In 2021, with bipartisan support, the Legislature created and funded the Maine Offshore Wind Research Consortium, which is tasked with creating and executing a Research Strategy that advances our understanding of the local and regional impacts of floating offshore wind to the Gulf of Maine through timely, impactful, and publicly available research efforts. Most recently, the state has expanded the Consortium Advisory Board to include representation from the Pleasant Point and Indian Township Passamaquoddy communities and, among other efforts to coordinate with Maine Tribes, the Consortium is working to identify and fund shared research priorities in the next round of Consortium-funded research projects. In October 2024 the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the federal agency that regulates offshore development, awarded offshore wind leases in federal waters of the Gulf of Maine to produce 6.8 GW of clean energy, enough power for 2.3 million homes. In August of 2024, BOEM awarded the state of Maine the first of its kind state research lease for the Maine Research Array.

Advancing the necessary infrastructure for an affordable, reliable and clean energy system requires long-term planning and investment. The GEO is committed to continuing its work and the facilitation of meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, developers, and state and federal agencies as it responsibly plans for and advances efforts related to achieving the state's clean energy and climate laws. In closing, as outlined by the Department of Transportation, Sears Island remains an important asset for the state and continued consideration of the Sears Island Transportation parcel preserves Maine's unprecedented opportunity for sustained long-term benefits from economic growth and resilience and locally produced clean energy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Celina Cunningham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Celina Cunningham, Deputy Director
Governor's Energy Office