

Testimony of Ashley Luszczi
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
In Opposition to
L.D. 226, An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in
Searsport by Extending Conservation Easement Protections, and
L.D. 735, An Act to Protect Sand Dunes on Sears Island and to Establish Criteria for Legislation
Regarding Land Development
March 12, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Ashley Luszczi. I am here on behalf of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce to testify in opposition to L.D. 226, “An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in Searsport by Extending Conservation Easement Protections” and L.D. 735, “An Act to Protect Sand Dunes on Sears Island and to Establish Criteria for Legislation Regarding Land Development.”

In 2007, the Sears Island Planning Initiative Steering Committee signed a Consensus Agreement designating Mack Point and Sears Island, one of the largest undeveloped islands on the East Coast, for transportation and conservation use. A diverse 15-member Joint Use Planning Committee, established by Governor Baldacci, was tasked with defining the boundaries of the two parcels and developing a conservation easement to balance economic opportunity and environmental preservation.

Shortly thereafter, in January 2009, Governor John Baldacci issued an Executive Order¹ (E.O.) directing 601 acres of Sears Island to be conserved by the Maine Coast Heritage Trust and 330 acres to be reserved for future transportation use. The E.O. further instructed the Maine Department of Transportation to “actively and aggressively” collaborate with the Maine Port Authority and other stakeholders to market and develop a cargo/container port at Mack Point and Sears Island using environmentally responsible technologies to minimize impacts while maximizing economic opportunities for Maine.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce is committed to fostering a strong business climate and economy. Last session, the Chamber supported L.D. 2266, which would have authorized the Department of Environmental Protection to issue a permit, pending all other necessary approvals,

¹ State of Maine, Office of the Governor. (2009, January). *Executive Order No. 24 FY 08/09: An order regarding the use of Sears Island*. https://lldc.mainelegislature.org/Open/Exec/ExecutiveOrders/72_Baldacci/2008-09/eo_2008-09no24.pdf

for the construction of an offshore wind terminal in a coastal sand dune system on Sears Island. The legislation was supported by a diverse group of stakeholders and was incorporated into the Supplemental Budget (L.D. 2214).

We believe that utilizing Sears Island for the purposes outlined in the Consensus Agreement and E.O. is a strategic economic opportunity. The language from L.D. 2266 and the Supplemental Budget represented a critical step. The development of an offshore wind terminal would advance Maine's climate goals while creating jobs and expanding the supply chain. The February 2023 *Maine Offshore Wind Roadmap*² reported \$13.5 billion in U.S. offshore wind investments, with projections reaching \$70 billion over the next decade. Additionally, the May 2022 *Maine Offshore Wind Talent Analysis*³ identified 117 key occupations necessary for offshore wind development.

If an offshore wind port does not materialize, the Chamber believes that fully conserving the island would mean forfeiting a strategic, economic and development asset. Port development for offshore wind or other maritime uses has the potential to create thousands of jobs ranging from site preparation, engineering, and construction to long-term career opportunities in logistics, maintenance, and research. Furthermore, the ripple effects would spur growth in Maine's transportation, hospitality, retail, and education sectors.

The Chamber believes L.D. 226 and L.D. 735 undermine negotiated agreements and would reverse the progress made by the 131st Legislature. Rendering the transportation parcel unusable for its intended purpose would eliminate a critical economic development asset for Maine.

We appreciate the Committee's consideration and urge you to vote ought not to pass.

² Governor's Energy Office. (2023, February). *Maine offshore wind roadmap: Charting a course for Maine's offshore wind economy*. Maine State Government. <https://www.maine.gov/energy/initiatives/offshorewind>

³ Governor's Energy Office. (2022, May). *Maine offshore wind talent analysis*. Maine State Government. <https://www.maine.gov/energy/initiatives/offshorewind>