

Jeremy McDaniel of Richmond Maine, President of Friends of Swan Island

Testifying in support of LD 976, Resole, to Restore Accessible Public Transportation to Swan Island in Perkins Township

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and honorable members of the TF&W Committee. My name is Jeremy McDaniel and I am the president of the non-profit group, Friends of Swan Island as well a resident of Richmond and father to 3 school aged boys who love to spend time on Swan Island, when we can get there. I am here to testify in support of LD 976 because Swan Island is such a wonderfully unique and diverse opportunity for my family, our local community, our schools and for Mainers to experience and learn about cultural history, that, to this day, continues to surprise. Since 1995, Swan Island has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places with its recognition justified, according to the National Park Service, because "there is nothing equivalent to this resource anywhere else in coastal Maine".

For 60 years, public transportation to Swan Island was provided by IF&W via the Swan Island Ferry. Countless families and children, students, outdoor enthusiasts, artists, historians, and Native American ancestors were able to take the 800 ft ferry ride across the Kennebec River to Swan Island to see this amazing island with miles of hiking and biking trails, wild rice fields, abundant wildlife, a terrific campground, historic colonial houses, and learn about Swan Island's significant cultural history.

However, all of this abruptly changed beginning in the summer of 2022 and by the Spring of 2023, public transportation to Swan Island was completely removed. Families could no longer take the ferry to Swan Island, students could no longer take educational classes and field trips to Swan Island and even local childcare providers who frequented Swan Island could no longer take children to Swan Island.

In fact, the last 3 years have been disastrous to Swan Island with the ferry service being discontinued and the ability to safely and equitably access Swan Island being at its lowest point in more than 60 years.

Currently, the only way you can access Swan Island is if you kayak or canoe across the Kennebec or if you are lucky enough to own a boat. That's it. However, both options have their own challenges. The Kennebec River is a tidal river with a fast river current, which is defined as strong enough to make swimming difficult and can carry debris and turbulence. Many people have set out to kayak around Swan Island and quickly realize they didn't have the stamina or experience to get to their destination or back from it. I will not let my children kayak here because of my concern for their safety. My family is lucky enough to own a boat, however, this presents many challenges as well. Currently, the Swan Island Pier, only 1000 feet or so from the Richmond town docks, has been closed off to boaters due to safety concerns that have been prevalent for nearly a decade. There is another access point on the east side of Swan Island that boaters can access. However, that docking system is small and only able to support two small boats at a time, or one large boat. If you happen to have a pontoon boat as I do, and there is a boat already at the dock, you physically can't dock there. We need to restore public transportation to Swan Island so families, schools, and our community can access the opportunities that await. I encourage you to please support this bill. Thank you.

I'm happy to take any questions you may have.