

Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

April 1, 2025

RE: LD 1264 Resolve Requiring the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Modify the Deed That Conveyed Montpelier, the General Henry Knox Museum in Thomaston to the Friends of Montpelier

Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am here to speak in favor of a proposal to modify the deed on the Knox Museum as transferred to the Friends of Montpelier.

I served in the Maine Legislature, both in the House and Senate, from 2002-2012 representing Thomaston and Knox County. I am currently the Selectboard Chair for Thomaston and have lived in town for over 40 years. One of the consistent landmarks of the community which honors our heritage, history and most famous resident is the Knox Museum. What many do not realize is that the current structure is a reproduction commissioned to honor the General in the late 1920s.

The Knox Museum has been preserved, protected, and operated by the Friends of Montpelier for many years, after suffering neglect and constant underfunding by the then owner, the State of Maine. The home is an economic anchor for our community, bringing thousands of visitors every year for activities such as "Boots on the Ground" on Memorial Day weekend, concerts, festivals, and many special events as well as regular tours of the facility allowing people to see the furniture and artifacts of General Knox's time in the famous replica of the house that Knox himself designed.

The museum stands at a crossroads. It needs some critical repairs to the grand porch facing Route One and to the railing protecting those on the porch. It also needs new windows replacing old drafty windows with replicas which allow for substantially less maintenance costs and greater fuel efficiency, and a reduced operating carbon footprint. These improvements are being proposed with great sensitivity to the original intent of this replica and, at the same time, bringing the operations and maintenance of the Mansion into the 21st Century. There are opportunities for funding those improvements through both grant and private sources. Unfortunately, that funding is not available if repeating the high-cost-to-maintain elements are put in place. The idea of repeating the mistakes of the past is not attractive to funders.

These changes are about a dedicated organization focused on their mission, telling the story of our great Revolutionary War Hero General Henry Knox and his role in the birth of our nation. The Friends mission is to the public, to young and old, to our veterans and their families and to preserving a replica of Montpelier for all to see. That mission is best fulfilled if the constant battle is not against elements of the facility that are extremely hard to maintain and repair and

are inefficient in their materials. Better alternatives exist and it is imperative that the group be allowed to utilize those alternatives while maintaining an appropriate and instructive replica for visitors to see and enjoy.

Thank you for considering the removal of the historic preservation restrictions on the structure preventing this goal by passing an amended LD 1264.

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