

132nd Maine Legislature, April 24, 2025

Testimony from Bernard Fishman to the joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, Regarding **LD 1614, a bill to Facilitate the Ability of the Maine State Museum to Acquire and Preserve Special Collections.**

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Murphy, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Bernard Fishman, director of the Maine State Museum, and I am here to offer testimony concerning LD 1614, a bill to 'Facilitate the Ability of the Maine State Museum to Acquire and Preserve Special Collections.' I will offer my comments as being neither for nor against the passage of this bill.

This well-intentioned and forward-looking proposal is based on a genuine need, namely that the Maine State Museum does not have sufficient good-quality collection storage space to accommodate present and future growth in its collections. In saying this I must recognize and express my gratitude to the present administration, the legislature, and especially to the Bureau of General Services (BGS) under DAFS, for making additional storage space available to the museum some three years ago, in connection with the renovation of the Cultural Building in Augusta. DAFS renovated portions of the Center Building, a disused structure once part of the old AMHI facility on the east side of the Kennebec, to make it available for subsequent storage use. This was, however, the first significant addition to museum storage space in decades, and the museum does not yet have sufficient climate-controlled, clean, dry, and accessible storage for the 800,000 objects presently in its collections, let alone future additions. One result is that the museum must sometimes consider declining significant potential donations because there is not the space, or not the right space, to properly accommodate them and care for them into the long future.

The lack of sufficient museum-grade storage for collections is a problem that many successful museums have. My understanding from BGS is that there is no state facility now available that could be renovated to provide additional collection storage needs for the museum, and that therefore only new construction could satisfy that requirement, which at today's prices would be \$ 500 per square foot, and would represent a major \$ 4.5 million commitment. One does not have to be a soothsayer to recognize that such a large expenditure is unlikely to be undertaken at this particular financial moment in the state's history.

But many states have invested in modern storage facilities to properly preserve heritage collections, and often those facilities include, for the sake of efficiency and cooperation, the collections of several state-operated cultural entities working together in the same facility. Here in Maine, the State Museum, of course, but also Maine's Bureau of Parks and Lands, and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, would surely benefit from having a joint storage facility for collections care, where important collections could be collectively preserved and researchers served.

While this might not be the time to consider such a facility, and forgive me for this suggestion, seeing as I am inexperienced in working with most of you and with some of our state systems, perhaps one way to begin to address this space issue would be to work with DAFS over the next year or more to create a master plan that would address the collection and preservation needs of the museum and other state agencies that have key historical holdings. As I have mentioned to this committee on previous occasions, though the state of Maine has been a good supporter of the museum and of our basic needs, the museum has over time developed mainly through opportunistically available facilities and augmentations, but has never had an effective, comprehensive, and pursued master plan to mark its expected development and guide its future facilities needs and growth. Perhaps the bill before you could be amended to encourage the museum and DAFS to together create such a master plan, which would be forward-looking, administratively thoughtful, and in keeping with the spirit of this bill. Developing such a plan would acknowledge Maine's pride in its impressive and inspiring historical heritage, which we can all, without exception, agree should be preserved in keeping with its great and lasting importance.