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April 29, 2025

Testimony of Rep. Valli Geiger presenting

LD 447, An Act to Expand Ferry Service to Matinicus Isle

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

Good afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Valli Geiger, and I represent House District 42, which includes Criehaven Township, Matinicus Isle Plantation, Muscle Ridge Islands, North Haven, part of Owls Head and the city of Rockland. I am here today to present **LD 447, An Act to Expand Ferry Service to Matinicus Island Plantation**.

Matinicus Island is located about 20 miles east of the mainland and is accessible by state ferry service from Rockland. It is the farthest inhabited island off the East Coast and is two miles in length and about 720 acres in size. It is a year-round island community and a summer colony. The population was 53 at the 2020 census. The dominant livelihood is lobster fishing.

Today, Matinicus is in an existential crisis. The year-round population, while steady for decades, is now declining. For generations, families lived year-round on the island. Their children were educated on the island and sent to boarding schools, mostly Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine, for high school. The advent of fast boats has allowed the adult children of the current year-round residents to reside on the mainland with their families, traveling daily to the island to fish. The year-round population is aging and increasingly spending several months during the winter on the mainland or further south. Last winter, the population was down to 14. Part of the struggle is in accessing the mainland for all services, from groceries to medical care, to larger items needed to keep building and infrastructure in repair.

Matinicus is served by the state ferry service, which currently makes 36 trips per year, which is less than one trip per week. The island has requested that the upper limit of ferry service be removed. It is the only island community serviced by the state ferry service that has an upper limit as defined in statute.

They are seeking the flexibility to create a ferry schedule with the state ferry service that will allow a few additional trips in a year. For example, the island will arrange for a repair service, such as an HVAC specialist to come to the island and service several houses at once. This requires a large amount of equipment and a day or two of work. The repairman then cannot leave the island with their equipment until another ferry trip, which might be over a week away.

I discussed this bill with the Maine State Ferry Service, and they did not object to the removal of a maximum of 36 trips per year, but it is my understanding that they are uncomfortable with the

bill's language making 36 trips the minimum rather than the existing 12 trips currently in statute. I did not want to harm the island by removing the expectation of at least 36 trips per year, but the island is amenable to an amendment changing the language to read: "Ferry service to Matinicus must be at least 12 times per year with additional service authorized as agreed upon by the residents of Matinicus Isle and the department."

Thank you for considering this change, long sought by the island. I am happy to answer any questions.