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**THE MAINE SENATE**  
132nd Legislature

*Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski in support of*  
**LD 1731, An Act to Increase the Influence of the Maine State Ferry Advisory  
Board on the Funding and Operations of the Maine State Ferry Service**  
*Before the Committee on Transportation*  
April 29, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Nicole Grohoski, and I am honored to represent the 22 communities of Senate District 7, among them the islands of Swan's Island and Frenchboro – two of the six islands served by the Maine State Ferry Service. Thank you for the opportunity to present LD 1731, "An Act to Increase the Influence of the Maine State Ferry Advisory Board on the Funding and Operations of the Maine State Ferry Service," which aims to strengthen community engagement and improve the governance of this essential service.

For island residents, the ferry is not a luxury or convenience—it's a daily necessity. The ferry is their road to the mainland, their access to health care, education, commerce, and basic services. When that connection becomes unreliable, it affects every facet of island life. In recent years, service interruptions caused by staffing shortages have created hardship and uncertainty, making it clear that more must be done to ensure long-term stability and accountability.

LD 1731 proposes a simple yet meaningful shift: to give the Maine State Ferry Advisory Board a more substantive role in decisions that directly affect the people it was created to represent. This bill would require the Ferry Service to engage the board in conversations about budgeting, planning, and significant operational changes. Topics like fare structures, scheduling, vessel maintenance, and overall rider experience would no longer be addressed in isolation—they would benefit from islander insight and feedback.

The legislation also introduces regular, structured reporting from the Ferry Service to the Advisory Board, including data on finances, service challenges, and rider satisfaction. The board would be tasked with reviewing this information and submitting its own set of recommendations to the Department of Transportation and to this Committee each January. These recommendations wouldn't be binding, but they would be part of the official record and must be meaningfully considered in future decision-making.

Importantly, LD 1731 does not propose expanding bureaucracy or spending more money. It simply ensures that the voices of islanders – and those who work most closely with them – are heard earlier and more often in the decision-making process. It adds transparency, structure, and accountability to a system that has too often left island communities feeling sidelined. Perhaps, if this bill were already law, the DOT might have come to a different conclusion about overnighting the ferries on the mainland.

This is not about micromanagement; it's about shared stewardship. The state and the islands are partners in this public service, and it's time the relationship reflects that.

Thank you for your time and consideration of LD 1731. I'd be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.