

132<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature, Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Testimony from Bernard Fishman, director of the Maine State Museum, regarding **LD 1648**, a bill to honor Margaret Chase Smith and Joshua Chamberlain in the National Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C.

May 5, 2025

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Hughes, and honorable members of the Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Bernard Fishman, Director of the Maine State Museum, and I'm here to offer testimony on LD 1648, a bill to honor Margaret Chase Smith and Joshua Chamberlain by placing their statues in Washington's Statuary Hall, and replacing the statues of Gov. William King and Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin that now represent Maine there. I am offering testimony neither for nor against the bill, but only to present information on the subject that may be useful as you consider it.

The matter of replacing Maine's statues in Statuary Hall has arisen before, and I went to Washington in 2016 with then-director of the Maine Arts Commission Julie Richard to examine that possibility. We produced a subsequent report that also included the result of a popular poll that named Senator Margaret Chase Smith and General Joshua Chamberlain as the most popular figures to be selected for such an honor.

In my own, personal, opinion, there are good arguments for replacing the two current Maine statues. Although King and Hamlin are important figures in Maine history, their statues have stood in Washington for several generations and they no longer embody the popular recognition and resonance that ensures that, to modern eyes, they represent the best of Maine. Moreover, the old statues are in archaic styles that similarly broadcast how out-of-date they are. And perhaps most tellingly, they do not include a woman. The suggested replacements are both heroic figures that excite today's admiration and can well stand to showcase what we in Maine now praise as deeply admirable.

The chief difficulty in effecting these replacements, however, is the cost of doing so, which would certainly exceed \$ 500,000 and could come close to a million dollars to create two new statues, move them to Washington, and move back to Maine the two statues being superseded, in addition to many other trips required by the work. Some of you may know that there is now a project to create a life-sized bronze statue of the famed Maine naturalist Flyrod Crosby, for placement in the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Building yet to be built in Augusta. That campaign is seeking to raise \$ 250,000 to pay for but one statue, and without the other expenses that would be accrued by exchanging the four statues in the present bill.

In addition, the process to select new Maine statues for Statuary Hall, as laid out at length in federal guidelines, is a complex and time-consuming one. It requires a resolution from the state legislature, approval by a federal Joint Committee on Library Action, a formal agreement with the Architect of the Capitol, approvals of the maquettes and of full-scale models, and other administrative steps, beyond the costs of paying the sculptor, fabricating the statues and their pedestals, moving the statues, travel for reviewing the work, and of ceremonial events, all of which the state proposing the new statues must pay for. As much as I might be attracted to see something like this happening, and how thrilled I and the State Museum and our sister agencies would be involved in such a process, in these financially difficult times it is by no means certain that such an ambitious effort could succeed. But I note that Arkansas did it in 2024, when it installed a statue of Johnny Cash, and perhaps we should not assume that in such a matter the great state of Arkansas can outperform the great state of Maine. Of course, I leave to you, and the legislative and executive arms of state government, consideration of where this possibility may take us, if anywhere; but, as the sages say, if not now, when?

Bernard Fishman