

T o w n o f C a r a t u n k

Office of Selectmen

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Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

March 17, 2021

Re: **LD 471** An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and distinguished members of the Committee:

On behalf of the town, we urge the Committee to support LD471: An Act to Require Legislative Approval for certain leases of Public Lands.

Currently, the Legislature must put forth a vote on any proposed lease on public lands. In 1993, 72% of Maine voters amended Article IX, Section 23 to the Maine Constitution. This states: "State park land, public lots or other real estate held by the State for conservation or recreation purposes and designated by legislation implementing this section may not be reduced or its uses substantially altered **except on the vote of $\frac{2}{3}$ of all the members elected to each house**. The proceeds from the sale of such land must be used to purchase additional real estate in the same county for the same purposes." (*emphasis added*) In 1994, the Legislature implemented this constitutional amendment.

It is appalling that this requirement of $\frac{2}{3}$ legislative approval was never adhered to by our state government when the State secretly signed a lease with Central Maine Power for 35 acres in Somerset County. This land, which bisects public land between Johnson Mountain and Wilson Pond, is highly esteemed for environmental and scenic values. Additionally, the NECEC Corridor will significantly alter the value and use of the land as well as damage wildlife habitat. To add further insult to injury, the State misrepresented Maine citizens by literally giving the lease away (at the illegitimate price of \$39/acre). When this violation of law was exposed, the State further deepened its crime with two more back room deals; these negotiations to increase the lease price were conceived again without $\frac{2}{3}$ approval of the legislature - by a new administration, revealing that corruption and constitutional avoidance is a bi-partisan problem.

LD471 simply reaffirms that the Bureau of Public Lands must secure a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote for the approval of their lease with CMP. Public lands belong to the citizens, not the executive branch.

We respectfully request that you support LD 471 to uphold our Constitution and to ensure appropriate oversight of public lands, thereby protecting the interests of Maine citizens and safeguarding Maine's democratic process.

Thank you for your time and service.

Elizabeth Caruso
Elizabeth Caruso
First Selectman