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The Honorable Tim Nangle and The Honorable Lydia Crafts
Joint Chairmen
The Committee on Transportation
Maine State Legislature
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Senator Nangle and Representative Crafts:

The proposed “Resolve, to Name a Railroad Crossing in Wiscasset the James Weldon Johnson Crossing” (SP0109, LD243) is of paramount interest to me because I am both a citizen of Wiscasset, as well as a retired public historian/historic preservation specialist with a specialization in heritage tourism. While I fully support the intent of the proposal, I have strong reservations about the use of a large, metallic signage (suspended or pole-mounted) in this instance—which is the traditional method employed by Departments of Transportation across the United States for such memorialization projects.

The Route 1 Corridor through Wiscasset is infamous for congestion, especially during the summer season. There are a plethora of visual distractions and traffic hazards in the historic Wiscasset commercial district, including additional signage, lights, and projecting sidewalks introduced as part of the Downtown Improvement Project concluded by MDOT only a few years ago. The railroad crossing itself, sandwiched tightly between the Wiscasset Bridge crossing of the Sheepscot River and Water Street, is the epicenter of such visual distraction and we should be focusing more attention on alleviating the situation than promoting additions to it (attachment 1). While I would support officially renaming the crossing at mile marker 49.10 to the James Weldon Johnson [Memorial?] Crossing *on paper*, I am strongly opposed to the usual large DOT signage (which would provide a traveler with no further knowledge of the life and contributions of the man—or how he met his death at said crossing in 1928). Instead, I urge you to rethink the traditional approach—just ever so slightly, resorting instead to interpretive signage that is safer, more educational in nature and visually pleasing—not to mention more cost-effective to procure, install and maintain.

The town of Wiscasset is blessed by a dynamic “Museum in the Streets” walking tour and interpretive panel program, further supported with printed brochures (attachment 2) and downloadable apps. I believe that public interest is best served if consideration is given to funding an additional interpretive wayside panel in lieu of a highway name sign. This panel could be placed on the town’s Creamery Pier at a point contiguous to and overlooking the railroad crossing (attachment 3). The panel would further note that it was sponsored by the citizens of this great state. Additionally, a QR code could link it to the records of the tragic 1928 event on Digital Maine website managed by the State Archives (www.digitalmaine.com/hist_docs/15/). Thank you for your consideration of this amendment to the Honorable Senator Talbot Ross proposal, which I believe will enhance educational value, ensure public safety and contribute to the aesthetic enhancement of an historic byway heavily traveled by a myriad of state residents and visitors.

Sincerely,

3 Attachments
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Kochan Attachment 1

Wiscasset Historic Downtown showing the railroad crossing where James Weldon Johnson was killed in a train-car collision in 1928 as viewed from Route 1 (Main Street) looking north to the bridge crossing the Sheepscot River. Note the unusually heavy placement of signage, lights, crossing lights, and other visual distractions already in place at or near the proposed memorial crossing site.



Attachment 2



Kochan Attachment 3



Top Image: Creamery Pier in Wiscasset looking towards the railroad crossing where James Weldon Johnson was killed in a car-train accident in 1928. The pier is heavily visited with nearby parking and is the most suitable public area for a wayside panel. **Bottom Image:** This panel is part of Wiscasset's Museum in the Streets program and is mounted at Creamery Pier.

