

OFFICE OF POLICY AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

Date: February 2, 2021
To: Transportation Committee
From: Karen S. Nadeau, Legislative Analyst

LD 43 – An Act To Require the Department of Transportation To Provide Ferry Service to Frenchboro

SUMMARY:

Current law provides that MaineDOT may operate the ferry route or routes to and from Frenchboro. This bill requires MaineDOT to provide ferry service to Frenchboro.

TESTIMONY:

Proponents: *Residents of Frenchboro; Island Institute; Summer resident of Frenchboro*
Written only: *Teacher at school on Frenchboro; Maine Coast Heritage Trust; Residents of Frenchboro; Seasonal residents of Frenchboro; Resident of Deer Isle*

- Frenchboro is located 8 miles south of Mount Desert Island at the mouth of Blue Hill Bay.
- Approximately 52 residents (46 registered voters, 17 commercial fishing boats, one-room schoolhouse with one teacher and three students).
- Simply request that Frenchboro receive equal status in law to the other unbridged island communities served by the Maine State Ferry Service.
- MaineDOT has provided ferry service to Frenchboro since the 1960s.
- This bill does not require additional service or otherwise adjust operations in any manner; this bill gives Frenchboro equal footing with other island communities.

Opponents: *None*

NFNA: *MaineDOT*

- 50% of the operational cost of the ferry service is subsidized by the Highway Fund (HF); the other 50% must come from Maine State Ferry Service revenues (ticket sales and parking fees).
- MaineDOT covers 100% of all capital costs associated with the service – boats, terminals, piers and other infrastructure.
- Maine's transportation funding challenges are daunting and the ongoing pandemic has compounded these challenges.
- Since the start of the pandemic, passenger trips are down 31% and vehicle trips are down 11%.
- Current service to Frenchboro includes 14 RTs per month with our vehicle ferry.
- Since early 2000s, MaineDOT contracts with private company to provide passenger-only trips to Frenchboro twice daily on Fridays between April and November.

RELEVANT STATUTES:

T. 23 section 4210-C (Marine Highway account), subsection 2:

2. Purpose of account. The purpose of the account is to allow the Highway Fund to provide support to the Maine State Ferry Service that was previously provided by the General Fund because ferries are an integral part of the highway system and carry motor vehicles and are the only method of vehicular transportation available to and from the islands. The state support to the Marine Highway account may not exceed 50% of the budgeted revenues that support the operating cost of the Maine State Ferry Service.

OTHER LEGISLATION:

LD 234 – AA To Amend the Law Concerning the Annual Number of Ferry Service Trips to Matinicus Isle

- Amends the law concerning ferry service to Matinicus Isle to remove the upper limit on the number of times per year the ferry may travel to Matinicus Isle.

INFORMATION REQUESTS:

- MaineDOT asked to provide a chart with the number of trips to each island – North Haven, Vinalhaven, Islesboro, Matinicus Isle, Swan’s Island and Frenchboro.

FISCAL IMPACT: *Not yet determined.*