

## MILL POND HEALTH CENTER

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August 25, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

SUBJECT: Letter of Support for the Federal Transit Administration FY2022 Ferry Service for Rural Communities Program

Dear U.S. Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Mill Pond Health Center and the Swan's Island community, I am pleased to express my strong support of the Maine State Department of Transportation's (MaineDOT) submission for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) FY2022 Ferry Service for Rural Communities Program. Funding support for operating costs would enhance the Maine State Ferry Service's (MSFS's) ability to provide reliable ferry service that is critical to supporting the islands they serve.

The six MSFS routes provide the only public transportation link and only way to move vehicles to and from the rural island communities of Swan's Island, Frenchboro, Islesboro, Matinicus, North Haven, and Vinalhaven. My community has no other link to the mainland. We do not have air service or private water taxi. The ferry service is our lifeline and our only link to the mainland. Swan's Island and the other five island communities served by the MSFS depend on reliable, affordable, and sustainable ferry service for access to jobs, education and services, as well as for emergency medical transport.

I am particularly interested in supporting MSFS's proposal to help defray the operating cost of the ferry service so that MSFS can stabilize, or reduce, the ticket prices to their customers.

The continuing increased cost of fares over the years has made it a challenge for many island residents to be able to afford to go to the mainland for grocery shopping, social activities, educational opportunities, and necessary medical appointments. Our small island health center only has a medical provider on the island several times a month, which is not nearly enough to satisfy the needs of our population. Many residents, including our large elderly population, require frequent visits to the mainland via the ferry for medical appointments, tests, physical therapy and occupational therapy. Cancer and dialysis patients travel back and forth for treatment multiple times a week. The cost for a vehicle, driver, and two-way reservation is \$80.00 during the summer months. It is slightly less in the winter. This is not affordable for most of our residents and especially those living on a fixed income. Most residents travel to the mainland multiple times a month, while some travel multiple times a week for medical care.

Some rely solely on their Social Security checks as their only income.

About 15% of the annual operating budget for the Mill Pond Health Center goes to ferry expenses. We pay all ferry costs for visiting medical providers who come out to offer services at the health center as well as paying for the ferry expenses each week to send laboratory samples to our local hospital for processing.

Swan's Island, and the other islands served by the MSFS, are vibrant, year-round communities that rely on MSFS to stay connected to the mainland. Teachers, contractors, plumbers, electricians, physicians, and many other critical needs personnel commute to the islands daily to work. Many island residents commute to the mainland daily to work. Without reliable, dependable, and affordable transportation, these island communities will fail to thrive and could be lost forever.

Please understand that the need for help to fund the MSFS's operating cost is urgent and critical. Without this help, fares will continue to increase and we are already at a tipping point for a large percentage of islanders with regards to what they can afford.

The Mill Pond Health Center supports and encourages MaineDOT's proposal for the Ferry Service for Rural Communities Program. This opportunity presented through FTA's Ferry Programs under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Consolidated Appropriations Act would help support crucial transportation service to the Maine island communities served by MSFS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donna Wiegler".

Donna Wiegler  
Director of Services  
Mill Pond Health Center