

April 22, 2023

Hon. Senator Chip Curry, Chairperson
Hon. Representative Tiffany Roberts, Chairperson
Innovation, Development and Economic Advancement and Business - Joint Standing
Committee

Augusta, Maine

Re: Letter of Support for L.D. No. 1286

Dear Chairperson Curry and Roberts:

As a long-time citizen of Maine I am writing you and your committee to support L.D. 1286.

Maine has been at the forefront of the sustainable use of the ocean for many years; however, our leadership position is slipping rapidly. States like Alaska, our neighbor Prince Edward's Island, as well as many countries including Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and New Zealand are fast overtaking or have surpassed us in ocean food and energy production. The Blue Economy bill once redrafted should create a task force that will propose a clear plan for Maine to regain the focus and leadership needed to build a world-class sustainable Blue Economy for the 21st Century.

I am hopeful that the successful implementation and execution of LD 1286 will among other things: 1) develop a clear, specific path forward addressing how to unite our fractured working waterfront and ocean use industries; and 2) make recommendations as to how to coordinate ocean use policies and legislation for the twenty first century.

In order to help unify our ocean based industries and successfully meet the goals of LD 1286, my first recommendation would be that the redrafted LD 1286 allow for a much higher percentage of appointed task force members to be owners or employees of ocean based companies. It looks to me that only potentially 2 of 23 seats might be so filled. Respectfully, such task force representation will ensure failure.

My second recommendation would be that the proposed bill expressly allow the task force to propose a specific action plan for greatly increasing Maine's aquaculture industry, particularly shellfish and sea vegetable aquaculture. Study after study of Maine's economic potential for the last ten plus years have all identified aquaculture as one of Maine top likely successful industries. The 2017 Focus Maine Ten Year Plan found that aquaculture was one of three industries that Maine should focus on developing for the benefit of our citizen's livelihoods and the long-term economic health of our state. We do not need to reestablish this well researched conclusion: we need to execute an effective plan, as soon as possible.

In the spirit of full disclosure my wife and I successfully created and operated for about a decade a Maine based rope grown mussel farm and processing business. By economic,

environmental or social metrics a best practices based mariculture (sea vegetables and shellfish) industry in Maine would greatly benefit its citizens. It could provide thousands of year-round well paying jobs and the related payroll tax revenue to the State. It would provide thousands of tons of sustainable, traceable, nutritious food for consumption and export from Maine each year. Finally, it would also help keep our ocean waters clean and healthy. The kelp grown in Maine is among-st the most carbon neutral, low fresh water use, nutritious, sustainably produced food industries in the world. Kelp removes carbon from the ocean and returns needed oxygen back into it. Mussels filter clean our ocean 24 hours per day. By some experts estimates one mussel can filter up to 10 gallons of water per day. Even a very small mussel farm cleans millions of gallons of ocean every day.

Maine's mussel farm industry is struggling to compete against Chile, New Zealand and PEI. Twenty five years ago there were about four mussel farming companies in Maine. Today, there are five established mussel farms. Rope grown mussel output has been declining or flat over most of this time. In comparison, PEI's mussel farm industry, started about the same time as Maine's, now includes approximately 130 farms that produce about forty-five million pounds of rope grown mussels, equaling about \$100,000,000 economic value per year. Many of these mussels are sold in Maine or shipped by truck across Maine to markets all over the United States. Maine only produces less than two million pounds per annum.

Sea kelp and other sea vegetable farms have started to proliferate in Maine over the last seven or so years. Until now, Maine has been at the forefront of developing best practices for farming and processing kelp. But these farms too, face the same regulatory, political and other barriers that have suppressed the mussel farm industry in Maine and kept it minuscule in size compared to its realistic potential. The twenty first century leadership for seaweed growing and production is now establishing itself in northern Europe and Alaska. Both regions have actively pursued well developed economic plans that are well funded. For example, \$100,000,000 has been invested in Alaska just in the last year to expand its fledgling seaweed industry. This investment could have been made in Maine. Maine is floundering and being left behind in this important part of the blue economy.

Maine has 3,500 mile coast line. With our clean and relatively cool ocean waters, working waterfront infrastructure and thousands of citizens with intimate knowledge of fishing, working and farming in the ocean, we are in theory extremely well situated to produce hundreds of millions of dollars worth of farm produced shellfish and sea vegetables per annum in an environmentally and economically sustainable fashion. But theory does not necessarily translate into reality. Our great potential will not be realized until we have a clear, specific plan. We also need focused, consistent and effective, top down political and industry leadership if we are going to have twenty first century aquaculture and other ocean based industries. Implementation of L.D.1286 could help Maine achieve these goals.

Without an honest and open debate about the challenges that Maine's ocean based businesses now face, including administrative, legislative and political hurdles, we will fail to create an effective path forward for Maine to successfully become a center for Blue Economy innovation in the 21st century. If we do fail, failure will be seriously detrimental to the economic health of Maine and the livelihood of its citizens for generations. Alaska, Prince Edward's

Island and most of the rest of the world understand the immense value and benefit of sustainably developing the blue economy. We in Maine must do the same.

In closing I respectfully suggest that the proposed task force will not be particularly effective if it is "chaired" or "co-chaired" by state government employees or political appointees. Such appointments will very likely chill the completely open and honest discussion that will be vital to the success of the task force's charge. Those of us that have been farming, fishing and creating other businesses in Maine's ocean for the last decade have seen this time and time, again. We witness even long established, member based organizations representing industries within Maine's ocean economy being very reluctant to challenge or criticize the policies or procedures of state commissions including the Department of Marine Resources and others. Even though our ocean is vast, our political "pool" is very small.

I am hopeful that passage of L.D. 1286 and the appointment of task force members from a broad array of actual mixed-use ocean industries / groups will allow Maine an opportunity to make an honest and accurate assessment and craft a detailed and specific plan for greatly improving Main's economy and the livelihoods of its citizens by developing a robust, modern Blue Economy, now.

Peter Stocks
South Portland
LD 1286

Dear Chairperson Curry and Roberts:

Please find my comments in support of L.D. 1286 attached.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Stocks