

Testimony of Nate Cloutier

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

April 27, 2023

**In Support of LD 367, *"An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Improve Highways, Bridges and Nonhighway Modes of Transportation"***

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee: My name is Nate Cloutier, and I am submitting comment on behalf of HospitalityMaine representing more than 1,200 restaurant and lodging operators of all sizes across the state. HospitalityMaine supports LD 367, *"An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Improve Highways, Bridges and Nonhighway Modes of Transportation."*

A safe, reliable, and accessible transportation network is paramount to Maine's hospitality industry. The hospitality industry relies heavily on tourists traveling to the state, experiencing its stunning natural landscapes, quaint coastal towns, and unique food and lodging cultures. The ability of visitors to access these destinations easily and safely is crucial to the industry's success. If visitors encounter poorly maintained roads and bridges, it can create a negative impression of the state, discouraging them from returning or recommending visiting to others. The proposed \$100M transportation bond is essential for the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) to continue working on current projects and future commitments. I would urge you to also consider the following:

- MDOT has an unmet need of \$265M per year, leading to a backlog of necessary repairs and maintenance for our highways, bridges, and roads.
- As a state, we have a commitment to maintaining our transportation systems and ensuring the safety and comfort of our citizens and visitors while promoting economic growth and development.
- Investment in transportation infrastructure is crucial to maintaining the industries that make our state unique and prosperous.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Commissioner Van Note and his team took necessary cost-cutting measures to attempt to offset the tremendous shortfall we are facing. The Highway Fund sometimes receives money from the General Fund, however that is not always guaranteed. Moreover, we are facing a tremendous workforce shortage in our state, and it is essential the Legislature focus on investing existing funds wisely on issues such as making childcare more affordable and building more workforce housing.

Well-funded roads and bridges are essential to maintaining the high quality of visitors' experiences in Maine. A reliable transportation system allows visitors to explore the state safely and efficiently, contributing to positive reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations, ultimately leading to more tourists and greater economic benefits for the state's hospitality industry.

The Legislature should continue to capitalize on its good credit standing and pursue any potential matching funds as it bonds. I urge you to please vote ought to pass on LD 357. Thank you for your consideration. I can be contacted at [nate@hospitalitymaine.com](mailto:nate@hospitalitymaine.com) with any questions you may have.