

To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation  
From: Emily Coffin, Seafood and Fisheries Coordinator  
Date: February 7, 2024

**Re: Testimony in Support of LD 2162 An Act Regarding the Homestead Property Tax Exemption and the Property Value Reassessment Process**



Honorable Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation:

The Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA) is an industry-based nonprofit dedicated to restoring the fisheries of the Gulf of Maine and preserving Maine's iconic fishing communities for future generations. As an organization founded and led by Maine fishermen, our objectives encompass providing a voice for fishing communities, rebuilding the Gulf of Maine ecosystem, and supporting diverse fishing businesses across the state. Working waterfront is a crucial component to anchoring successful fishing businesses within our local communities. This access has always been a limited resource on the coast of Maine. With intensified coastal gentrification, shifting marine resources, climate change, and amplified pressure on the fishermen and fishing businesses, the future of seafood-based working waterfront is in more jeopardy than ever. As such, we are asking for your support of LD 2162.

Maine's working waterfronts are vital lifelines, serving as bustling hubs for commercial fishermen. They are more than mere business locations; these vibrant spaces are rich with stories, housing a diverse community of seasoned individuals, providing refuge, fostering connections, and offering essential support. These waterfronts, deeply embedded in Maine's heritage, are crucial for its future.

Dotting Maine's rugged coastline, these waterfronts vary immensely. From expansive wharves handling millions of pounds of lobster to modest docks utilized by a handful of fishermen for gear storage and maintenance, their conditions range from state-of-the-art to those in dire need of repair. Despite their differences, each one plays a critical role in the fishing community, offering access to the water and a safe return after long, arduous days or even weeks at sea.

For commercial fishermen, these waterfronts are indispensable. They rely on them for safety, stability, and accessibility – aspects fundamental to their livelihood and daily life. However, Maine's working waterfronts face increasing vulnerability. The commercial fishing industry is confronting numerous challenges, compounded by shifts in Maine's economy and culture, and the escalating threats posed by climate change. It's imperative to recognize and address these pressures to preserve these pivotal coastal pillars for current and future generations.

LD 2162 targets a critical threat endangering working waterfronts: skyrocketing property taxes that surpass what many owners can afford. This issue puts Maine's coastal communities at risk of becoming unaffordable for local fishermen, potentially leading to a widespread displacement of these families from their homes and communities. While the current Working Waterfront credit offers some relief, it falls short in encouraging participation. LD 2162 seeks to bolster the

incentives, aligning them more closely with the Farmland Protection Program and other similar state initiatives.

The bill's provision for a two-year grace period before imposing penalties is particularly noteworthy. Commercial fishing is among the most hazardous professions in the U.S., with a high injury risk. In the lobster industry, the owner-operator rule mandates the presence of the owner on the vessel for operation, making the risk of business disruption due to injury quite real. This grace period would provide critical flexibility and reduce the stress of program enrollment. Although we understand that the penalty clause might be removed, its initial inclusion is an important step in addressing a significant barrier to program participation.

Furthermore, there's a pressing issue in our coastal communities: property valuations lagging behind the current real estate market. As these values are updated, many fishermen may face the harsh reality of being priced out of their own homes with waterfront access. With our coastline undergoing rapid changes, it's imperative to devise strategies to protect those who rely on the sea for their livelihood. We have an opportunity to start solving those issues now, before the assessment process begins in more coastal communities.

Preserving working waterfronts isn't just about protecting individual fishermen; it's about maintaining the cultural heritage and bolstering the economy of these coastal communities. The picturesque scenes of lobster boats and buoys, along with the renowned seafood from the Gulf of Maine, are not only iconic but also pivotal to our thriving tourism industry.

Enhancing the Working Waterfront program is essential to safeguard the livelihoods of countless families along the coast. Your consideration of this matter is crucial for the future of Maine's coastal heritage and economy. Thank you for your attention and support on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Emily Coffin

Seafood and Fisheries Coordinator  
Maine Coast Fishermen's Association