

February 13, 2024

Kaitlyn Nuzzo, Government Relations Director
The Nature Conservancy in Maine
kaitlyn.nuzzo@tnc.org



***Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic
Advancement and Business***

***RE: LD 2191, An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe
Weather-related Events***

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to provide written comments in support of LD 2191, An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe Weather-related Events.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

LD 2191 is an innovative, on the ground solution and we applaud Senator Hickman for bringing this idea forward. As outlined in the emergency preamble, Maine has recently experienced back-to-back severe weather-related events. From Kennebunkport to Lubec, communities and businesses were heavily damaged. It was the worst storm event most Mainers have ever seen. Sadly, it's unlikely to stay that way – a damaging event like this that we once considered likely to strike every 100 years has now become much more commonplace. Establishing the Small Business Weather Emergency Relief Program and capitalizing it with \$50,000,000 will offer critical support to Maine small businesses. We know many of these entities are still assessing damages and we expect the impacts to be felt far and wide – from flooded buildings to damaged roads to working waterfronts.

As the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) works to shape this program, we suggest they consider ways these relief funds could support repairs or rebuilding efforts that enhance Maine's resiliency to climate change and considers nature-based solutions to protect against future damages. Our organization would be happy to brainstorm ways to incorporate those considerations into the program if that would be helpful.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of LD 2191.