



To: Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business

Re: Testimony in support of LD 2191, *An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe Weather-related Events*

From: Amy Winston, State Policy Director

2/20/24

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and Members of the IDEA Committee: My name is Amy Winston and I live in Edgcomb. I am unable to be at today's hearing on this important bill. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI), where I am director of state policy.

[CEI](#) is a community development corporation (CDC) and community development financial institution (CDFI) based in Brunswick. Founded in 1977, CEI's mission is to build a just, vibrant, and climate-resilient future to make the economy more equitable for people and communities in Maine and rural regions. We do this by integrating finance, business expertise, and policy solutions. As you know, small businesses are the backbone of our economy. Most Mainers depend on them for their livelihoods as well as supplies and services, staples and discretionary purchases. In the aftermath of the severe storm in December and back to back storms in January, CEI has heard from businesses about damaged production facilities and equipment, lost inventory, and additional expenses they have incurred along with revenue lost due to the serious and significant disruption to lives and commerce that this volatile weather has caused to both inland and coastal communities.

It is unclear what federal disaster assistance will be available for businesses. We thank Senator Hickman for bringing this emergency after-deadline bill forward with Maine small businesses in mind. While we understand this bill, initially, may have emerged out of specific concern for retail businesses in his district, a weather emergency relief fund to stabilize small businesses statewide is timely and needed. Maine's Climate Council will have additional recommendations for resilience later this year, in time for the 132nd Legislature. Meanwhile, an immediate response is merited.

Paired with LD 646, *An Act to Provide Appropriations and Allocations for the Operations of State Government* – the Governor's standalone emergency bill to provide grant funds to rebuild and protect public infrastructure and essential community assets, such as working waterfronts on which entire industries and many coastal community economies depend, LD 2191 will play an important role in stabilizing and sustaining Maine businesses and economic activity. Together, they can mitigate the devastating effects of these storms and rebuild critical infrastructure with an objective of long-term resiliency and long-term business financial sustainability.

It is promising to see that working waterfronts are being called out specifically in the conversation about rebuilding and resilience. While it is heart wrenching to hear fishing families talk about the destruction of wharves and waterfront infrastructure their grandparents built as sea rise and storm surges become untenable, it is critical to understand just how vital working waterfront infrastructure is to Maine's coastal economy.



- These properties are the essential conduit to seafood commerce.
- Many wharfs and piers are in dire need of repair (from the recent storm damage) to allow safe access for fishermen and sea farmers to land their products.
- With the upcoming lobster season and Maine's robust tourism economy, wharf owners and municipalities can't wait for federal processes - insurance claims or grants – through FEMA or MEMA; they need critical investment now.

Thank you for considering this bill. We encourage all of you to vote Ought-to-Pass on LD 2191.