



Testimony of the Island Institute In Support of LD 2191, An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe Weather-related Events

February 13, 2024

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, Members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Nick Battista and I am testifying on behalf of the Island Institute in support of LD 2191 and generally in strong support of providing urgent relief to Maine's small businesses impacted by the recent storms.

The Island Institute is a 40-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. Island Institute's work focuses on building economic, climate, and community resilience in support of Maine's island and coastal communities. We work with communities where 1 in 5 residents hold a lobster license, and access to a robust working waterfront is critical to the survival of businesses and the economic well-being of families.

In the aftermath of the two coastal storms in January, it became clear that Maine's working waterfront businesses would receive little direct support from any Federal disaster declaration, and what support might come would be weeks or months in the future. Given the urgent need for Maine's working waterfront businesses to secure their wharves and prepare for a busy and economically critical summer season, Island Institute redirected our existing Business Resilience Grant program to address storm-related needs. We added funds to the program, doubled the typical award amount from \$2500 to \$500,0, and focused the fund on working waterfront businesses that directly support fishing and aquaculture on islands and in fishing dependent communities.

As of Friday, February 9th, we have made 18 awards totaling \$90,000. These awards support working waterfronts that directly employ 272 people and are the critical connection between the shore and the sea for over 800 fishing boats or aquaculturists who rely on these facilities. We have received an additional 75 applications totaling over \$250,000 in immediate funding requested. We anticipate making additional awards in the coming days.

Our small awards are helping these working waterfront business owners place down payments on pilings and wood, deposits to secure barges and cranes, and other work to help make sure these businesses will be up and running as soon as possible. While we can step in here with small grants, the need for rebuilding is significant, and the options are limited.

Please support LD 2191 and Maine's small businesses that have been impacted by recent weather events.