



March 6, 2024

The Honorable Margaret Rotundo, Senate Chair
The Honorable Melanie Sachs, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
State House, Room 228
Augusta, ME. 04333

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

My name is Sebastian Belle and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA). The MAA represents Maine's aquatic farmers and the many infrastructure companies that provide goods and services to our producers. Our farmers annually produce over 100 million dollars in farm gate revenue and directly employ roughly 700 Maine citizens year-round. We purchase goods and services from over 400 Maine businesses and our total economic impact is roughly 150 million dollars annually. I stand before you today to testify in **strong support** of LD 2225 "An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events"

The last year has seen extreme weather events severely impact the states working waterfront infrastructure. Estimates of the impact vary, but based on our members responses to several statewide surveys MAA believes that damage to both public and privately owned marine infrastructure is historically unprecedented. Wharfs, piers, boat ramps and packing houses up and down the coast sustained extensive damage. Estimates of the cost of reconstruction are in the hundreds of millions of dollars. You will hear from many of our fellow working waterfront stakeholders today about these damages. LD 2225 provides funding for infrastructure adaptation, repair and improvements that support public safety, protection of essential community assets, regional economic needs and long-term infrastructure resiliency. This funding is needed as soon as possible because our fishing, farming and harvesting seasons are short and our peak activity starts in about one month's time. Without the funding provided in LD 2225 many of the impacted facilities may not be rebuilt in time for this year's season. Some of them may never be rebuilt and be lost forever.

Maine has a long tradition of working waterfronts. Maine seafood is an iconic part of the Maine brand and Maine aquaculture products have earned their place as part of that brand. Please help us continue to build that brand and give DOT the resources they need to help rebuild Maines working waterfronts. Vote **OUGHT TO PASS** on LD 2225. I thank you for your attention and patience and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Sebastian M. Belle
Executive Director