



Testimony of Island Institute in Support of LD 2225, An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events

March 6, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Stephanie Welch. I am testifying on behalf of Island Institute in support of LD 2225 and the proposed investment of an additional \$50 million in the Maine Infrastructure Adaptation Fund to help communities rebuild following recent devastating storms. With more than \$90 million in damage to public infrastructure across the state, and millions more in damage to private businesses, these funds are essential to restore the infrastructure and assets that are vital to the public safety and economic viability of communities.

Island Institute is a 40-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We work with Maine's island and coastal communities to navigate climate and economic change, expand opportunity and deliver solutions. We work alongside communities and partners to sustain, protect and prepare waterfront assets for future use, and we support community-driven adaptation and resilience solutions in the face of a changing climate.

Maine's island and coastal communities sit on the front lines of climate change and are experiencing extreme weather events, such as the recent devastating storms, with increasing frequency. Flooding roadways and washed-out culverts threaten to cut communities off from essential services. Rising seas are jeopardizing drinking water, and storm water systems are overwhelmed. These challenges exceed the financial capacity of Maine's small, rural coastal and island communities. An additional investment in Adaptation Fund is essential to ensure communities have access to resources not only to restore infrastructure, but to rebuild with resilience to mitigate future damage.

Working waterfronts along Maine's coast also experienced devastating storm damage. This critical infrastructure, much of which is privately owned, is the backbone of Maine's marine economy. Working waterfront infrastructure is essential for fishermen and aquaculturists to access the shores and waters that support their families and communities. A 2019 Sea Maine report highlighted the statewide economic impact of Maine's seafood sector, which provided \$3.2B in economic output in 2019 and supported 33,300 jobs. The working waterfronts that support this economic activity are already under intense pressure, with only 20-miles remaining along Maine's 3,500 miles of coastline. With few opportunities to fund the significant repairs needed to restore private wharves, these important assets are under even greater threat.

Recognizing this threat to privately owned working waterfront infrastructure, within the first week after the Jan. 13th storm, Island Institute launched a storm response grant program and

began awarding grants to support the recovery of working waterfront businesses, providing relatively small but meaningful resources to assist with clean-up and equipment replacement in the immediate aftermath.

What we learned from reviewing 100+ applications from the island and coastal communities was both devastating and hopeful. While some applicants had their wharves completely destroyed, nearly all were dedicated to repairing with greater climate resiliency in mind. The owners of critical working waterfront infrastructure that reached out for assistance understand that these types of storms are the new normal and that they can and must rebuild stronger and higher. The proposal to make the \$50 million Adaptation Fund investment accessible for private infrastructure upgrades with significant community benefits, such as working waterfronts, is an important tool to rebuild with resilience.

I urge the Committee to support LD 2225. An invest an additional \$50 million in the Maine Infrastructure Adaptation Fund is essential to repair, rebuild and improve infrastructure that is crucial to the safety and vitality of Maine's coastal and island communities, and communities across the State. Thank you for your consideration.