



Testimony in support of LD 2225 - *An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events*

March 1, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

My name is Julie Hashem. I am Community Development Director for the City of Rockland, and testifying in support of LD 2225 – a bill that would make \$50 million in funding available through the Maine Infrastructure Adaptation Fund. With devastating damage from recent storms demonstrating the vulnerability of public infrastructure to extreme weather events and flooding – this fund has never been more important to communities throughout Maine.

I would like to share with you today why this program is important for Rockland and the public infrastructure we provide to the region.

Rockland’s Downtown Waterfront includes two multi-use piers and related onshore facilities that provide access to Rockland Harbor and Penobscot Bay. The facilities are important for commercial and recreational users from throughout the region and beyond – including islanders, excursion boats, pleasure boats, working vessels, cruise ships and first responders. But the facilities are at risk and have sustained significant and repeated storm damage and flooding even at current sea levels. Decking ripped up by storm surges, sinkholes, and water that overtops the seawall and makes facilities inaccessible are becoming all too common. In the last storm, as the private pier next to one of the City’s piers collapsed into the harbor, it was all too obvious that our own facilities -- which are so important to the regional economy -- are on borrowed time.

Redevelopment of our Downtown Waterfront with a resilient design is a complicated project that involved a team of design professionals to engineer. It includes a complete redesign of the piers, including provisions to build decks in sections so that if sea level turns out to be higher than expected during the design life, we can adapt without having to completely rebuild. It involves moving facilities out of the flood zone, and increasing site elevations as much as 4 feet, depending on location. And because of the elevation changes, it involves redesign of utilities and stormwater management, and careful blending with neighboring properties. It’s a big project – an all in, we are looking at a financial need of about \$20 million.

For a community of roughly 7,200 people – with fully half of Rockland households meeting the federal definition of low income – a \$20 million project is more than daunting. It's a nonstarter without help from State and federal grants.

There is perhaps an unprecedented opportunity today to bring federal infrastructure funds to Maine. But we can only do that if we have match for federal grants. If a given federal grant requires 20% match – that is \$4 million on a project like this – too much for a small, low-income community like ours to cover on our own. That is why the Maine Infrastructure Adaptation Fund is so important to us. And why it's important that the fund have sufficient resources to make grant awards of a meaningful size.

Please note that Rockland's Downtown Waterfront Project is only one example of need. The City also has more than \$30 million in stormwater improvement projects identified – projects that become increasingly urgent with the severity of recent storms. We have benefited from two small grants from the Maine Infrastructure Adaptation fund – one to engineer a stormwater project, and another to help implement. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. We have many more stormwater projects to go – projects that matter to avoid polluting the harbor, flooding neighborhoods, and washing out roads.

When you consider Rockland's other waterfront facilities, there are millions more in need still.

And we know Rockland is not alone. Communities throughout Maine face similar challenges.

Honestly, when we look at the scale of the need – not just in Rockland, up and down the coast and throughout the State – we would suggest that \$50 million isn't anywhere near enough. But it's something. And anything you can do to help communities access federal funds and proactively avoid damages will pay back many times over.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Respectfully submitted,

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