



**To:** Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

**Re:** Testimony in support of LD 2225, *An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events (Emergency) (Governor's Bill)*

**From:** Amy Winston, State Policy Director

3/6/24

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Members of the AFA Committee: My name is Amy Winston and I live in Edgcomb. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Coastal Enterprises (CEI).

[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.

In the aftermath of a very 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. As a member of the Maine Won't Wait Coastal and Marine Working Group and the Midcoast Regional Economic Development District Advisory Committee, and after tuning in to press coverage of these events as well as the Maine Climate Council's emergency meeting called in the aftermath, I learned about the loss of and damage to significant infrastructure on which many coastal and inland communities and businesses depend for their jobs, livelihood, way of life and economic viability.

While it was unclear what federal disaster assistance would be available to businesses, we recently advocated for [LD 2191](#), An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe Weather-related Events in IDEA, to support Maine's small businesses that were directly affected by these storms. Most Mainers depend on small businesses for their livelihoods as well as supplies and services, staples, and discretionary purchases. However, we know that businesses depend on municipal and other public infrastructure. Therefore, it is critical to support the towns that are working hard to replace, rebuild and adapt their critical infrastructure for use by their anchor businesses.

We thank the Governor and the Speaker for bringing this emergency bill forward. *Maine's Climate Council* will have additional recommendations for resilience later this year, as part of *Maine Won't Wait 2.0*, in time for the 132nd Legislature. Meanwhile, Maine *can't wait*; an immediate response is appropriate and needed.

This emergency bill to provide immediate funding for the adaptation of grant funds to rebuild and protect significant public infrastructure and essential community assets, such as working waterfronts on which entire industries and many coastal community economies depend, is an appropriate and necessary use of the Budget Stabilization or Rainy Day Fund. This damage was sustained literally as a result of very rainy days. LD 2225 will play an important role in stabilizing and sustaining Maine's



significant infrastructure and as a result, Maine businesses and economic activity. Working together, Maine towns, counties, regional planning commissions, state agencies and the private sector 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. 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. Yet it is especially important to understand how working waterfront infrastructure is vital to Maine's 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 the Committee to support LD 2225.