

To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations And Financial Affairs
From: Gerry Cushman, President Port Clyde COOP
Date: March 5th, 2024

Re: An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events

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

I am writing this letter **to express my support for LD 2225**: An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events on behalf of myself and the Port Clyde Fisherman's Co-Op. I am a lifelong fisherman and a founding member of the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, as well as a board member of the Maine Lobstermen's Association. Our community is reeling in the face of unprecedented destruction along Maine's heritage coastline following the January storms.

The damage has heightened financial concerns already brought on by changing oceans and a pressured economy. Maine's seafood economy brought in over 3.2 billion dollars last year as a collective. Our own Tenants Harbor Co-Op netted over \$7.5 million in lobster revenue, alongside affiliated aquaculture farmers who brought in around \$150,000 and a bait business that accounts for over \$350,000 per year. We also count a mooring operator within our Co-Op who operates on more than \$200,000 a year. The last ground fisherman in the area relied on our wharf to land over 60,000 lbs of fish last year. Together, we represent a small, essential business within the fishing industry, but we are suffering from catastrophic damage prohibiting a workable fishing year.

Like us, most fishermen rely on communal infrastructure to access their boats, store their gear, and keep and buy bait. **We are not the only community incapacitated by the January storms.** These relief funds would benefit not only a property owner in need of financial help, but entire communities reliant on shared wharves, docks, and piers. Beyond fishermen themselves, Maine relies on its iconic coastline for character, tradition, and personality. **Without our working waterfront, we are not ourselves.** Many business owners are in the difficult position of being unable to afford to rebuild and thus selling their generationally owned, highly valued waterfront properties to interests beyond the fishing industry. If properties are sold now, they will be lost forever to the fishermen who rely on them. Very rarely can a fisherman afford to buy back a waterfront parcel, especially in this housing market.

The use of these funds to support essential and vulnerable fishing communities would be **pivotal**. A fisherman's life is one of brotherhood, sisterhood, and neighborhood. I know of countless instances in which fishing days have been called off and nights were dedicated to helping a friend, family member, or neighbor in a time of need. To provide relief to one or more members of our community is to provide relief to all. LD 2225 would be a transformative act of legislation for countless families along our coastline. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,
Gerry Cushman
Port Clyde Fishermen's Co-Op

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LD 2225

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