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March 3, 2025

Testimony of Representative Holly Eaton

LD 736 An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships at the Maine Maritime Academy

Before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Representative Holly Eaton, and I proudly represent House District 15, which includes the island and coastal communities of Deer Isle, Stonington, Brooklin, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Frenchboro, Swan's Island, Isle au Haut, and Vinalhaven. Four of these communities—Frenchboro, Swan's Island, Isle au Haut, and Vinalhaven—are entirely reliant on ferry service for transportation, making the reliability of these services absolutely essential to daily life. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of LD 736.

Although my name does not appear on this bill as a co-sponsor due to an administrative oversight, I was fully committed to supporting this legislation from its inception. I commend Representative Ray for bringing this bill forward and for recognizing the urgent need to strengthen our maritime workforce.

As you know, ferry services are a critical lifeline for Maine's island communities. The Maine State Ferry Service, along with private and quasi-public ferry operators, ensures that island residents can access essential goods, medical care, education, and economic opportunities. However, the ongoing workforce shortage in the maritime industry threatens the reliability of these services. Without a steady pipeline of trained ferry operators, the sustainability of ferry services—and, by extension, the well-being of our island communities—is at risk.

LD 736 takes a proactive and strategic approach to addressing this challenge by creating a Workforce Development Scholarship Program at Maine Maritime Academy. By providing

**District 15: Brooklin, Deer Isle, Eagle Island Township, Frenchboro, Southwest Harbor,
Stonington, Swan's Island, Tremont, Isle au Haut, Vinalhaven**

targeted financial assistance for students pursuing ferry operator training, this bill ensures that more qualified individuals can enter the workforce without financial barriers. Additionally, the requirement for Maine Maritime Academy to collaborate with ferry service operators will ensure that training programs align with the real-world needs of our transportation network.

This legislation is not just about filling jobs—it's about securing the future of Maine's island communities. Unreliable ferry service disrupts every aspect of island life, from small businesses that depend on timely deliveries to families who rely on consistent transportation for school and medical appointments. Investing in workforce development through scholarships will provide long-term stability and resilience for our ferry systems.

I urge the committee to support LD 736 and help ensure that our ferry services remain a dependable and sustainable part of Maine's transportation infrastructure. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.