



The Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
Testimony of Dana O'Brien, BioHarbor Strategies, LLC

In Support of LD 1023

LD 1023, Resolve, to Reestablish and Continue the Work of the Maine Blue Economy Task Force

March 27, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed members of the Committee,

My name is Dana O'Brien. I live in Ogunquit and am the founder of BioHarbor Strategies, a public affairs firm focused on innovation in food, agriculture, and marine economies. I had the privilege of serving on the consultant team leading the Maine Blue Economy Task Force, and I am proud of the group's focus, collaboration, and ability to deliver a consensus report in record time.

I am here in strong support of LD 1023, which will continue the critical work of the Task Force. I want to thank Senator Jill Duson for her leadership in bringing this conversation to Maine's ocean economy stakeholders and the bipartisan cosponsors from Washington to York Counties and beyond, including my senator, Mark Lawrence.

I will focus my testimony on the Task Force's recommendations, which are designed to seize Maine's unique strengths and remove barriers to growth, ensuring we lead—not follow—in the rapidly expanding blue economy. Our report is built on three core themes:

1. **Innovation** – Fostering industries like marine biotechnology, sustainable aquaculture, ocean data technology, and sustainable boatbuilding.
2. **Collaboration** – Strengthening connections between research institutions, industry leaders, and state agencies.
3. **Investment** – Modernizing coastal infrastructure, funding R&D, and strengthening Maine's workforce pipeline.

To advance these priorities, the Task Force recommends five strategic actions:

1. **Establish a Maine Center for the Blue Economy** – to align and organize stakeholders under a singular state strategy; a public-private hub to drive innovation and attract funding.

2. **Prioritize State Investment in Blue Economy R&D** – creating a dedicated fund to accelerate research.
3. **Streamline Regulatory Processes** – appointing a blue economy ombudsman and reducing permitting delays.
4. **Expand Workforce Training** – strengthening the talent pipeline for blue economy jobs.
5. **Strengthen Coastal Infrastructure** – investing in working waterfronts and climate resilience.

These steps will position Maine as a national leader in sustainable ocean-based economic development, but we must act decisively.

While LD 1023 is a solid bill, I encourage the committee to consider friendly amendments to strengthen it, including:

1. **Sharpen Task Force 2.0's deliverables** – directing it to define the Blue Economy Center's scope, location, and funding model.
2. **Highlight support for an R&D matching fund**, recognizing its broad endorsement from Maine's research community.
3. **Codify the definition of Maine's blue economy**—ensuring heritage industries and sustainability are reflected in a global perspective.
4. **Provide a modest fiscal note** so Task Force 2.0 can work efficiently and effectively from day one.

Finally, I urge the committee to closely evaluate our recommendations on streamlining regulations and investing in coastal resilience—themes that appeared across multiple economic roadmaps we reviewed.

Maine has a rare opportunity to define the future of the blue economy. With bold leadership, we can turn our coastal and marine assets into lasting economic prosperity. I urge your support for LD 1023.

Thank you, and I welcome any questions.



Dana O'Brien
Founder and President
BioHarbor Strategies
Ogunquit, ME