

To: The Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
From: Emily Coffin
Date: April 9th, 2025

Re: LD 1368: An Act to Provide a Property Tax Exemption for Allowing Shellfish Harvester Access to the Intertidal Zone

Dear Honorable Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation,



The Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA) is an industry-based nonprofit dedicated to restoring the fisheries of the Gulf of Maine and preserving Maine's iconic fishing communities for future generations. Founded by Maine fishermen, and represented from Cutler to Kittery, MCFA advocates for collectively developed solutions to complex ecosystem, community, and management problems. We run various programs and efforts to preserve Maine's working waterfront, for without it, our fishing communities would be at a great disadvantage. As more people move into the state and waterfront property is bought and sold, it is important that we do what we can to safeguard points of access for our local fishermen. **We support LD 1368: An Act to Provide a Property Tax Exemption for Allowing Shellfish Harvester Access to the Intertidal Zone** because of its effort to conserve access for those who need it to make a living and to help solidify the many handshake agreements that exist between harvesters and homeowners throughout the state.

Many intertidal shellfish users, especially those without airboats, use numerous access points throughout their respective towns to catch what they can. As availability changes throughout the year, harvesters need to access different tidal zones and use handshake agreements with homeowners to use small paths as entry points onto the flats. In Maine, we are seeing waterfront property bought and sold at an unprecedented pace and these handshake agreements often disappear as new homeowners move in who do not have a longstanding relationship with their local harvesters. If a harvester loses access to a traditional entry point, they would likely be pushed to use public landings and boat ramps. This has several ramifications:

1. The public landings will be more crowded which will affect fishermen, Marine Patrol, community members, and visitors.
2. Harvesters would lose access to the diversified shellfish stock, as they would only be able to access intertidal flats near public landings.

3. If all harvesters were forced to use public landings, they would deplete nearby stock more quickly, leading to destabilization of income, the health of the fishery, and food sources for other creatures in the ecosystem.
4. They may be forced to buy an airboat to avoid the aforementioned issues. These boats are loud and controversial in some towns but are a direct result of harvesters losing access to paths they traditionally use to access the flats.
5. Increased risk of danger: when shellfish harvesters are forced into shared areas and make less money due to high competition, they may be more likely to go out in bad weather. We lose harvesters in small crafts almost every year.

A property tax exemption for homeowners would incentivize new and old property owners to allow shell fishermen to continue to access the walking paths they rely on to transport themselves to plentiful fishing grounds and safe coves. It would also provide the opportunity for new homeowners to get to know their local fishermen and develop an appreciation of our state's working waterfronts and those who depend on them.

It is our understanding that this property tax incentive is very similar to those offered for forestry, open space, and working waterfront, although no existing program applies to these walking paths. We believe that this is a proper solution to a slowly snowballing problem of access loss. Maine's softshell clam fishery was the second most valuable last year, after lobster, at \$15,461,017. Our harvesters earned \$58,971 more dollars than the year previous. Shellfish harvesters may not be as visible or obvious as our lobster fishery to those who visit the Maine coast, but they are integral to our blue economy and fishing industry as a whole. Shoreside access is a critical tenet of our state's working waterfront and deserves to be preserved. We are proud to support this bill and continue to advocate for fishermen up and down the coast as our state welcomes new homeowners and new occasions for harmony between fishermen and community members. Thank you for your consideration on this issue.

Emily Coffin
Seafood and Fisheries Policy Coordinator





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