



**Testimony of Island Institute in Support of LD 362, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Replenish the Land for Maine's Future Program**

April 10, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gere, and Members of the Appropriation Committee, my name is Nick Battista, and I am testifying on behalf of Island Institute in support of LD 362.

Island Institute is a 42-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We boldly navigate climate and economic change with island and coastal communities to expand opportunities and deliver solutions. Much of our work takes place in the communities that are highly dependent on fishing, and the bulk of these communities are east of Damariscotta. The economy of these communities is closely tied to fishing and aquaculture, and these industries rely heavily on working waterfront infrastructure.

Maine Won't Wait, the State's climate action plan dedicates a strategy – F5 – to protecting working waterfront infrastructure, and this strategy says in part that "Maine's working waterfronts are vital to the state, both economically and culturally, and access to the ocean is crucial to Maine's identity."

The January 2024 storms highlighted the role working waterfront infrastructure plays in Maine's coastal communities. We are grateful for the \$25 Million this Committee supported last session for working waterfront resilience. While rebuilding from the storms helps businesses today, we also need to increase the number that are permanently protected. Pressures from the land – rising housing prices, changing community demographics, shifting local economies – are combining with pressures from the water – fickle international markets, uncertainty around future regulations, a warming Gulf of Maine, and changes in fish stocks. Together, these forces squeeze working waterfront infrastructure.

Land for Maine's Future is one of the few existing State programs that can secure long term protection for working waterfront infrastructure – particularly privately owned infrastructure. It is important to note that privately owned working waterfronts often support the community well beyond the people employed by the business. In the wake of the January 2024 storms, Island Institute provided \$250,000 in grants to 52 working waterfronts. These businesses employed 540 people directly and supported the economic activity of another 1195 commercial boats. Most of these boats help another 2 or 3 people make a living.

LMF is a foundational program for Maine and our collective work to help ensure Maine's fishing heritage continues into the future. I urge the Committee to support LD 362.