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Maine's Rural Development Council

**Testimony of Joe Oliva, Outreach and Communications Director of
GrowSmart Maine
in support of LD 1245, An Act to Create a Fund to Spread Awareness of
Maine's Working Waterfronts**

April 25, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

My name is Joe Oliva and I am the Outreach and Communications Director for GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

The fund established by LD 1245 is not just a step in the right direction - it is a necessary tool in the effort to support and protect working waterfronts in Maine. Working waterfront properties are the keystones of our coastal communities as economic drivers and conservators of cherished ways of life. Yet, mounting pressures related to growth, gentrification, climate change, and other factors have precipitated what amounts to an existential threat for many of these already limited resources.

GrowSmart Maine supports passage of LD 1245 as it relates to a core tenet of our organization: "it's better to change than to be changed". The resources provided through the fund will be used for information campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the aforementioned issues and help strengthen a coalition of advocates and stakeholders who understand the gravity of what's at play for many of Maine's coastal communities. Technical assistance funds provided through this program will further buoy the efforts of stakeholders and community members to navigate rapid macro-level change in ways that make sense at the local level.

The Working Waterfront Information and Technical Assistance Fund is a much needed tool for the state as we, collectively, balance addressing the needs of current and future residents as they relate to housing, transportation, and other growth-related challenges while preserving access to local natural resources, heritage industries, and the invaluable sense of place felt in every Maine community.

