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Concerns Regarding LD 1763

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To: Joe.Baldacci@legislature.maine.gov, Anne.Carney@legislature.maine.gov, Stacey.Guerin@legislature.maine.gov

Dear Senators Baldacci, Carney and Guerin,

As a lifelong boatbuilder, commercial fisherman and Maine resident, I am acutely aware of the divide between Maine's working waterfront and coastal property owners. I am concerned that LD 1763 would exacerbate that divide, protecting the interests of Maine's wealthiest residents while curtailing the rights of working-class Mainers.

It seems that the primary motivations for LD 1763 are concerns over environmental impact and tax equity. Given that these could be addressed through legislation that falls short of a complete ban on non-powered houseboats, I have to believe that the primary reason for the ban is that *waterfront property owners don't want to have to look at them*. This falls in line with an increasingly prevalent attitude along the coast: that waterfront landowners deserve special consideration and treatment proportionate to their tax burden. Whether or not you find that troubling is a personal matter; I certainly do.

Additionally, LD 1763 would have the following effects:

1. Exacerbating the housing crisis:

For some young Mainers who make their livelihoods on the water, yet can't afford coastal (let alone waterfront) real estate, the ability to live on a houseboat is one of their last remaining options for staying close to their work and connected to a traditional way of life. I can think of at least four examples of commercial fishermen in the Midcoast living on small non-powered houseboats either part-time or full-time. All have proper sanitation systems and occupy a smaller visual footprint than most yachts. All would be in non-compliance with LD 1763, and one would be rendered homeless by the legislation.

2. Limiting a long-standing Maine tradition of ingenuity and craftsmanship:

Maine has a rich boatbuilding heritage, and wooden houseboats are a small but important part of that heritage. Several years ago I was lucky enough to work on the restoration of a traditional wooden houseboat built in 1929 by a well-known Islesboro boatbuilder, Willis Rossiter, and used for many years as his home and workshop. It has been a fixture of the coast for nearly a century, but is now in danger of being rendered an illegal "Nonwater-dependent floating structure." Restricting houseboats to the narrow parameters outlined in LD 1763 would favor commercially built powerboats which most Mainers can't afford. The ability to build our own watercraft from local materials for working, living and recreation is an important part of Maine culture that LD 1763 would hurt.

3. Failing to address real concerns about housing and the environment:

Maine is facing an unprecedented crisis in the availability and affordability of housing: in light of this, taking away an option for those few with the necessary skills and interest to exercise it is a misplaced effort. Likewise, Maine's waters and coastal landscape are facing well-researched and documented threats from climate change, sea-level rise, industrial activity and failing septic systems. I'm unaware of any formal studies on the environmental impacts of non-powered houseboats, and I feel strongly that legislation of this sort should be based on science, not conjecture.

Despite the concerns listed above, I appreciate that there are real problems that LD 1763 is trying to solve, and would support legislation that addresses them in a more targeted manner. For instance:

1. Making distinctions for the size of the water body, and distinguishing between inland and tidal waters. I agree that non-powered houseboats (along with cruise ships and high speed powerboats) should be restricted on small inland ponds. Banning their use across *all* Maine waters lacks nuance and common sense.

2. Providing a legal framework for towns to tax full-time houseboat residents. As a volunteer firefighter, I appreciate the costs that go into keeping our towns safe and functional, and agree that houseboat residents should share in these costs.

I appreciate your time and consideration in this matter. I would be happy to discuss it further at any time.

Sincerely,

Milo Stanley