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Maine's Rural Development Council

Testimony of Joe Oliva, Outreach and Communications Director of GrowSmart Maine in support of LD 1845, An Act To Establish The Working Waterfront Advisory Council

May 8, 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 formal establishment of a Working Waterfront Advisory Council as laid out by LD 1845 would go a long way towards supporting and protecting Maine's incredibly valuable working waterfronts. These properties are the keystones of our coastal communities as economic drivers and conservators of cherished ways of life.

We're excited about this bill because it correctly recognizes and supports working waterfronts as a long-term priority of the state. Though the growth-related pressures of the moment – housing shortages, gentrification, the loss of access to natural resources – are felt acutely, working waterfronts are also threatened by extreme weather events, warming waters and other climate-related instabilities that show no sign of relenting into the future.

The annual reports submitted by this Council – whose constituents will include critical stakeholders in the form of nonprofits, communities, fishermen and aquaculturists – will provide legislators with the information necessary to better support our working waterfronts and make them a strategic priority, not just for our coast, but for our entire state.

These properties and businesses are the beating heart of our coastal communities and fuel the economic growth of our state as a whole. Failure to protect points of access and infrastructure on our waterfronts threatens our heritage fishing industry and puts our emerging blue economy at risk.