

Testimony on LD 1763: An Act to Establish a Moratorium on Non-Water-Dependent Floating Structures

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As someone who is acutely aware of the ongoing and growing divide between Maine's working waterfront and its part-time coastal property owners, I'm deeply concerned that LD 1763 would worsen this imbalance. Rather than protecting Maine's traditions and working communities, this bill appears designed to protect the aesthetic preferences of the state's wealthiest residents, those who can afford waterfront property—at the expense of working-class Mainers who rely on creative, self-reliant solutions to remain close to their livelihoods.

I understand that this bill is framed around concerns over environmental impact and tax equity. But if those are truly the primary motivations, then we should pursue thoughtful, evidence-based solutions to those specific issues—solutions that stop well short of an outright ban on non-powered houseboats. In the absence of supporting research or scientific data, it's hard to escape the conclusion that this legislation is largely driven by a desire to cater to the aesthetic preference of coastal landowners.

Beyond the philosophical concerns, LD 1763 would have serious and tangible consequences:

1. It would exacerbate Maine's housing crisis.

Maine is in the midst of a severe and well-documented housing crisis, particularly in coastal communities where the cost of real estate has skyrocketed due to second-home ownership, short-term rentals, and speculative development. For many working Mainers—especially those who depend on access to the water for their livelihood—traditional housing is now financially out of reach.

By targeting non-powered houseboats, LD 1763 doesn't just criminalize a form of housing—it targets the people who have had to rely on it because they've been excluded from every other option. It punishes resourcefulness, independence, and a way of life that has helped define Maine's working waterfront for generations.

Rather than supporting policies that preserve affordable and sustainable housing options, this legislation contributes to a pattern of exclusionary development that increasingly serves only seasonal and wealthy property owners. It furthers the transformation of Maine's coast from a working landscape to a curated view—available only to those who can afford it.

2. It would stifle a long-standing tradition of Maine ingenuity.

Maine's boatbuilding heritage is one of the most enduring and creative in the country.

Wooden houseboats represent a small but significant piece of that history. I spent over a decade restoring a traditional wooden houseboat built in 1929 by Islesboro boatbuilder Willis Rossiter, great-grandfather of my nephew, Farley Willis Rossiter. Farley and his family now can spend time in the houseboat his grandfather, Dick Rossiter, grew up on. Under this bill, such vessels would be reclassified as illegal. At a time when most Mainers can't afford high-end powerboats, the ability to design and build our own watercraft—using local materials, for work, living, and recreation—deserves support, not restriction.

3. It fails to address the real threats facing our coastal environment and housing supply.

We're in a housing crisis. Any legislation that removes one of the few available paths to secure, self-sufficient housing for working people should be approached with extreme caution. Likewise, our coastal ecosystems face real, well-documented threats from climate change, sea-level rise, and failing infrastructure. I'm unaware of any formal studies showing that non-powered houseboats contribute meaningfully to these problems. Policy based on conjecture rather than data is not good governance.

That said, I recognize that LD 1763 aims to address some legitimate issues, and I would support legislation that does so in a more focused and balanced way. For instance:

- **Tailoring restrictions by geography.** It makes sense to distinguish between small inland water bodies and tidal waters. Non-powered houseboats—just like cruise ships or jet skis—may be inappropriate for smaller ponds, but a blanket ban across all Maine waters lacks nuance.
- **Creating a framework for fair taxation.** Full-time houseboat residents should absolutely contribute their fair share through local taxation. Let's create a system that ensures that, rather than banning an entire way of life.

In closing, LD 1763 threatens to limit affordable housing, erase cultural heritage, and deepen an already troubling socioeconomic divide—all without clear evidence that it solves the problems it claims to address. I urge the committee to reject this bill in its current form and work instead on legislation that protects our environment, honors our traditions, and respects the rights of all Mainers.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Erik Scott