

January 28, 2026

Subject: Opposition to LD 1477 (H.P. 969) - An Act to Provide an Exemption from Pilotage Requirements for Passenger Ferry Service Between Bar Harbor, Maine and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

Dear Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation,

The Lobster Advisory Council (LAC) met on January 27, 2026. At this meeting, we received a legislative update from the Department of Marine Resources. During that agenda item, Jason Joyce, who represents the Zone B Lobster Council on the LAC requested discussion of LD 1477.

Following that discussion, the LAC voted unanimously to send a letter to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation documenting our strong opposition to LD 1477. This bill proposes to exempt the passenger ferry service operating between Bar Harbor, Maine, and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, from the standard pilotage requirements. We believe that any exemption from the standard requirements poses a significant and unacceptable risk to the safety of all vessels operating in the waters surrounding Bar Harbor.

The waters around Bar Harbor are a complex and challenging navigational environment. The area is characterized by:

- **Heavy concentration of fishing gear:** The waters are actively used by numerous commercial lobster boats, with a high density of fixed fishing gear that can change on a daily basis.
- **Variable and strong tides and currents:** The unique geography of the area creates strong and often unpredictable tides and currents that require intricate local knowledge to navigate safely.
- **Frequent fog and adverse weather:** Bar Harbor is prone to dense fog and other severe weather conditions that can dramatically reduce visibility and increase the risk of collision.
- **High volume of recreational and commercial traffic:** The area is a popular destination for recreational boaters, whale watching tours, and other commercial vessels, creating a congested and dynamic maritime environment.

A local pilot, with their extensive and up-to-date knowledge of these specific conditions, is essential for ensuring the safe passage of large vessels like the passenger ferry. The nuances of local fishing practices, the precise locations of gear, and the subtle shifts in currents are all critical pieces of information that a local pilot provides.

Reducing the requirements for a licensed local pilot would leave the ferry without this crucial layer of safety. This not only endangers the ferry and its passengers but also the lives and livelihoods of the many fishermen and other mariners who share these waters. A single incident could have devastating consequences for our community and the marine environment.

We understand the desire to reduce operational costs, but this cannot come at the expense of safety. The current pilotage requirements are in place for a reason, and they have served to protect our waters and our maritime community for many years. We are disappointed that proponents of this change did not engage the Zone B Lobster Council in discussions around this bill despite requests by the Zone B Council to do so. We strongly urge the committee to consider the significant safety risks associated with this bill and to vote against its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,
Jeff Putnam
Chair, Lobster Advisory Council