



DATE: March 5, 2026  
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development  
FROM: Sam Warren, UMS Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer  
RE: **LD 2116, An Act To Establish the Maine Blue Economy Center**

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Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

Maine's Blue Economy is one of the state's most powerful and promising engines for economic growth, workforce opportunity, and long-term resilience. Our increasing global leadership in this growing sector builds on our lengthy coastline, vibrant working waterfronts, natural resources, rich maritime heritage, and **the research and innovation strengths of the University of Maine — the state's only R1 research university and a federally designated Sea Grant institution.** With an economy dominated by small businesses that often lack in-house research capacity, **UMaine serves as Maine's R&D Department — translating science into solutions that support coastal communities, companies, and livelihoods from Calais to Kittery.**

Recognizing the depth and breadth of our work and the opportunities for Maine, our flagship recently launched the Marine Aligned Research, Innovation, and Nationally-recognized Education (MARINE) initiative. **UMaine MARINE serves as a hub for coordinating and connecting the dozen marine-focused research, education, and outreach units at UMaine and its regional campus, the University of Maine at Machias, and advancing solutions** that are practical, scalable, and grounded in the state's needs.

Just in the past five years, **UMaine has secured more than \$120 million in Blue Economy-related federal, state, and private investment**, which is supporting shared research facilities, workforce training, industry and community partnerships, and student research learning opportunities that are enabling our working waterfronts and coastal communities to rise to meet the challenges of changing markets and climates and build resiliency for the future.

**UMaine researchers — including our students — work directly with aquaculture farmers, fishermen, processors, boatbuilders, and coastal municipalities to deliver science-informed innovation across the Blue Economy.** Their work includes developing sustainable shellfish and seaweed cultivation techniques that improve yields

while protecting water quality; strengthening iconic industries such as lobster through data-driven research and value-added product development; maintaining ocean observation buoy systems that fishermen consult each day; advancing vessel electrification and composites to modernize Maine boatbuilding; and engineering practical coastal resilience solutions that protect infrastructure and communities from increasingly severe storms.

Our students engage in hands-on research from their first semester at UMaine and UMaine Machias, train on working waterfronts and aquaculture farms, and participate in paid internships, apprenticeships, and micro-credentialing programs aligned with the needs of the marine industry. These experiences **increase student success, strengthen the Blue Economy talent pipeline, and make it more likely that graduates will be retained to live and work in Maine.**

Recent and upcoming initiatives further strengthen this pipeline. UMaine is launching new experiential learning programs in digital modeling and marine systems, expanding interdisciplinary training across science, engineering, and policy, and opening a new Sustainable Aquaculture Workforce Innovation Center later this year that will allow students and industry partners to train on real-world systems while advancing research on feeds, species diversification, and production efficiency.

Given this tradition of excellence and impact, we were proud to have a UMaine representative serve as a voting member of the Blue Economy Task Force, which ultimately recommended establishing the Maine Blue Economy Center, as proposed by LD 2216. **As the Legislature considers how best to strengthen and grow Maine's Blue Economy, including through this new exciting center, UMaine and the broader University of Maine System stand ready to continue leading and serving as a trusted partner.** Led by UMaine, our public universities bring research capacity, workforce expertise, statewide reach, and a long-standing commitment to collaboration that can help ensure Maine's Blue Economy continues to develop in a way that accelerates economic growth and competitiveness, stewards our natural resources, sustains vibrant communities, and improves the prosperity and quality of life for all Mainers.