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Public Testimony of LD 2216 – An Act to Establish the Maine Blue Economy Center

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. I am Representative Tiffany Strout from Harrington, representing the towns of Milbridge, Harrington, Columbia, Columbia Falls, Centerville, Addison, Jonesport, Beals, Jonesboro, Roque Bluffs, Whitneyville and Machias and I am here today to provide testimony in opposition of LD 2216 **An Act to Establish the Maine Blue Economy Center.**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the creation of the blue economy center. Living in DownEast Maine I am very familiar with the importance of the blue economy as it is the backbone of the entire economy of the area.

I am very appreciative of the opportunity to have been on the Blue Economy Task Force 2.0 and participate in many meetings to go over ideas and share ideas on what growing the blue economy industries could look like for the State of Maine. I was also on the housing subcommittee, spoke on a panel about the blue economy at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and went on the Blue Economy tour to see how other New England states are working to grow their blue economy economic opportunities. There was a great group of people from many different backgrounds and education and hands-on experience on the task force. From the task force there were different ideas of focus, but I believe everyone agreed there is great opportunity for new industries to work both on and off the water.

Unfortunately, after reading LD2216, as currently written, I will not be able to support this bill.

This bill is written to establish a center that does not acknowledge the sustainable heritage industries that are the blue economy. As mentioned above, the blue economy is the economy of not only DownEast Maine but stretches the entire state contributing approximately \$3 billion a year to the Maine economy. While I can appreciate the need for emerging industry, entrepreneurs and aquaculture, a center designed to promote the blue economy with taxpayer money should in fact also help promote and provide opportunities for those small businesses who have built the wild caught industries with their own money, investment, time and stewardship.

Here are some additional concerns: the board is also established with no seat specifically added for someone from the commercial fishing industry, there should be a clearer definition on what “make payments instead of taxes” means, if the legislature dissolves the center any funds left after debts paid should be transferred to the Department of Marine Resources, I would recommend the commercial fishing safety fund, and the eligible recipients of the funds should be restricted to Maine owned companies in the State of Maine.

I would like the center to specify that no funds will be allocated to any projects that would industrialize the ocean and all businesses wanting to be established on or around the ocean must work with the Department of Marine Resources and follow established laws and rules related to blue economy industry.

The fiscal note attached to this bill seems excessive for the start of the center. There are no overhead costs such as building and electricity and all the developments listed in the center should not require a large amount of funds. The cost would be related to individuals who may be hired to run the center and again, this cost should be relatively small starting out considering we have many organizations already established in the state working on all aspects the center is hoping to combine and promote.

District 11 Addison, Beals, Columbia, Columbia Falls, Harrington, Jonesboro, Jonesport, Machias, Milbridge, Roque Bluffs, Whitneyville, Centerville Township, and North Washington (Part)

I am a very big advocate for the blue economy and see the potential for growth across many sectors, not just jobs on the water. There does need to be an entity that can combine all the information and opportunity for this sector to grow and to be a place where those who would like to invest have an easy opportunity to do just that, invest. The growth of the blue economy helps to diversify our ocean economy and be a contributor to not only the state, but more importantly the local economies who depend so heavily on the traditional blue economy industries.

Development of an entity that can be focused on the blue economy is definitely needed and overtime would help to provide job opportunities across the state in many sectors. I do not believe we need another agency overseen by political influence that favors the political climate of the elected priorities. Taxpayer money should be used sparingly and with direct impacts on growth and future sustainability projects, not just written ideas with no return on investment.

Instead, I would like to see the establishment of a Blue Economy Chamber of Commerce type entity. The definition of a chamber of commerce is an association of businesspeople to promote commercial and industrial interests in the community. The blue economy chamber could also include a place where grants can be listed, education collaboration opportunities can be highlighted, business listed for purchase of goods and education on the importance of protecting natural resources for continued opportunities for future generations can be showcased. This type of entity would allow anyone in current or emerging industries to have the opportunity to participate, and the investment comes from those who will be experts in their field and values the opportunity to invest in their future. It also should allow contributions from outside entities that would like to support the blue economy but are not business owners themselves. Looking at the already established Maine State Chamber of Commerce may be a good starting point to build upon.

Again, I appreciate all the efforts of those who have worked on the Blue Economy Task Force 1.0 and 2.0 and to the sponsors of the original bills. This is an extremely important part of our state economy and if we are going to make the most of the opportunities for all of the possible investment, creating a more transparent nonpolitical entity will have a greater success of moving the Blue Economy forward, at least in my opinion.

Thank you for your time today and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Tiffany Strout
State Representative