



**Testimony Presented by Curtis Bohlen, Director of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership,  
on behalf of the University of Maine System, in Support of A-642 in Governor's Proposed  
FY24-25 Biennial Budget (LD 258) – Feb. 16, 2023**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Brenner, and Representative Gramlich, Members of the Appropriations and Environment Committees:

I am Curtis Bohlen, Director of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership. I am here today to overview the essential work we do on behalf of Maine's people, environment and economy, and the critical importance of the ongoing \$35,000 annual appropriation, which the Governor's budget proposal continues in FY24-25 (see A-642).

The Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP) is a National Estuary Program. We are a part of the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine, which is of course part of the University of Maine System. The Legislature has provided funding to CBEP since 1997. The \$35,000 in State funding that CBEP has received annually since 2003 provides a critical portion of the one-to-one non-federal match that is required for us to continue to receive federal National Estuary Program funds. That State investment currently helps leverage over \$1.5 million in federal funds.

Like all National Estuary Programs, at heart we are a collaboration. The Partnership includes municipalities, citizen organizations, federal and state agencies, academics, businesses and individuals. Together, we work to keep Casco Bay and our nearly 1,000 square miles of watershed clean and healthy. We also assist communities facing water-related challenges, from stormwater management to sea level rise.

We are science based, watershed focused, and collaborative. We offer a foundation of credible information and strategic oversight. We build consensus and facilitate communications. Some recent successes made possible in part by your investment:

- Over the past 25 years, CBEP Habitat Protection Fund Grants have assisted land trusts and municipalities with protection of over 10,000 acres in more than 20 towns. Many of the protected areas have become important regional assets and a boon to residents and the tourism economy.
- Thanks to the availability of federal infrastructure funds through the National Estuary Programs, we have recently commissioned a high-resolution coastal ocean model that will extend from Saco Bay to Boothbay. The model will have direct application to protecting water quality but will also benefit commercial and recreational users of our coastal waters and improve resilience to coastal storms.
- Since 2011, our Community Engagement Grants have contributed over \$111,000 to support 41 community-based projects in our region, ranging from high school marine science projects to community events.
- Last year, CBEP brought together members of the community to engage with Maine DEP and EPA's N-STEPS program to consider the scientific basis for marine water quality criteria for nitrogen pollution in Maine waters.

- We recently worked with emergency management agencies, social service organizations, town planners and environmental advocates in several towns to improve response to major storms, with an eye toward reducing the impact of natural disasters on our most vulnerable citizens.
- CBEP's staff continues to be a public resource by participating in local, regional and state-level working groups, boards and commissions. For example, I served on the Coastal and Marine Working Group of the Maine Climate Council, and I have been a member of Maine's Board of Pesticide Control for more than ten years.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Casco Bay Estuary Partnership. I look forward to answering your questions.