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Good morning Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and members of the Committee on Marine Resources. I am Representative Billy Bob Faulkingham and I am here to present LD 710, "An Act to Fund the Lobster Legal Defense Fund".

This bill is a continuation of LD 1916, "An Act To Create a Legal Defense Fund for the Maine Lobster Industry." The amendment before you is one that simply extend the availability of funding until 2030. The fund will continue to be funded by the industry utilizing 20% of the license surcharges assessed by the Department. The amendment also changes the date of a report back from the Department to 2025, and removes unnecessary language related to submission of a bill from this committee in the second regular session.

As you all are well aware, the Maine Lobster Industry is under attack. We are facing crippling regulations and industry collapsing lawsuits. The threats we face aren't politically partisan in nature, and while we have made progress in winning the battle of public opinion, that's not where this battle is being fought. It's being fought in court. Common sense and science have been totally disregarded by radical extremists who have weaponized the Endangered Species Act to target an industry that itself is full of some of the most environmentally conscious, and conservation minded men and women you will ever meet. That is why we need the most vigorous legal defense we can obtain.

I won't get into the details too deep, but I do believe it bears repeating that the last time a North Atlantic right whale was entangled in Maine lobster gear was over 19 years ago, and it was successfully freed. No right whale death has ever been linked to the Maine lobster industry. Over the last two decades the industry has made many gear modifications, and altered the way we fish to reduce the risk of entanglement. It has worked.

The State of Maine and the Maine Lobstermen's Association are fighting ongoing battles in Washington D.C. Because of their work and the many others involved, there has been a 6 year moratorium put on the severe regulations to our fisheries. Over the next six years there will be numerous cases in the courts that will be crucial to our industry. It is important that we extend this funding into the year 2030, which is when the moratorium ends. The State of Maine cannot afford to be bullied into losing one of our most sustainable resources that is a huge economic driver for all industries across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope the committee will recognize the importance of this bill and help us fight these regulations at the Federal level. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Representative Billy Bob Faulkingham