



Senator Reny, Representative Hepler and members of the Marine Resources Committee. My name is Marianne LaCroix. I am the executive director of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative, an organization charged with promoting Maine Lobster globally and providing a voice for the industry. I am here to testify ~~neither for nor~~ against LD 710, An Act to Fund the Lobster Legal Defense Fund.

Providing a legal defense for the industry is very important, but maintaining positive public opinion of Maine lobster is also critical. Legislation passed last year diverts 20 percent of the funds collected for marketing to the Lobster Legal Defense Fund for the next two years. I respectfully ask that you do not consider additional cuts to the marketing program as an alternative to the general fund dollars.

The Collaborative works to increase demand for Maine Lobster, and we also protect the brand reputation of the product and the fishery. Last year, we faced intense media scrutiny because of issues around right whale regulations, lawsuits and sustainability certifications. The Collaborative provided a coordinated and broad marketing effort, including:

- Advertising campaign promoting positive sustainability messages
- Fact sheets to educate customers and media on the issues
- Webinars to educate industry members and customers
- Sustainability content including a video series, Boston Globe advertorial, MAT release and broadcast media tour
- Message coordination between DMR, MLA, our congressional delegation's offices and other industry group and individuals
- Media and message training for industry spokesmen
- Public relations outreach and response

There are multiple indications that our efforts worked. Lobster dealers reported that our educational materials were persuasive and influential in retaining customers. Only one major buyer decided to *discontinue purchase* of Maine Lobster even though many had indicated their intent drop the product based on the certification losses. An analysis of media coverage around the right whale issue shows that 82% of the coverage includes a positive Maine Lobster voice. To counteract negative media coverage, we launched an advertising campaign that ran our sustainability videos alongside the negative coverage, resulting in over 400,000 video views.

Further cuts in funding will prevent us from providing meaningful and critical marketing support to protect the brand reputation of the Maine Lobster product and fishery. We have a 6-year pause in new regulations around right whales. This is an important time for us to educate consumers and buyers about Maine Lobster's commitment to sustainability to ensure continued confidence in purchasing at both a wholesale and consumer level.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.

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