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Testimony of Representative Morgan Rielly introducing

LD 427, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Invest in Research, Development and Commercialization in Maine's Marine Technology and Aquaculture Sector

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Good morning Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. I am Morgan Rielly, and I represent House District 127, which includes part of Westbrook. I am here today to introduce **LD 427, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Invest in Research, Development and Commercialization in Maine's Marine Technology and Aquaculture Sector**.

This bill proposes a bond of \$25 million to be awarded through a competitive process to Maine-based public and private entities, for the purposes of research, development and commercialization in the State's marine technology and aquaculture sector to be used for infrastructure, equipment and technology upgrades to enable organizations to gain and hold market share and to expand employment or preserve jobs.

We need a sustainable, environmentally friendly, and local sources of food. I see aquaculture as the way to address this while retaining our coastal heritage and preserving the working waterfront as Maine weathers the changes due to the ongoing climate crisis. **LD 427** provides an opportunity for us to further many of the goals highlighted in the [Maine Aquaculture Road Map](#) that was published in January 2022. After reading through the report and speaking with people who work in the aquaculture industry, I have found that one of the biggest issues for the industry is access to capital.

In addition to the provisions laid out in the bill, I suggest that the committee adopt language that ensures these monies go to small aquaculture farms, are equitably distributed and support lobstermen—many of whom have started growing seaweed to supplement their income—and other commercial fishermen looking at diversifying into aquaculture. Additionally, I suggest that the

funding in this bill be directed to the Maine Technology Institute with the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) consulting on how to best allocate monies as DMR wouldn't have the capacity to distribute these funds alone.

According to the Maine Aquaculture Road Map, there is a demand for traceable, sustainable, high-quality seafood, and Maine has an opportunity to be a leader, both in the United States and across the world. According to the report, the U.S. imports nearly all of its seafood with close to a \$20 billion trade deficit. This trade imbalance is unacceptable and opens us up to vulnerability in today's world.

In the Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020, the report highlighted that sustainable aquaculture is a sector of Maine's economy with immense potential that will compliment commercial fishing and could make Maine a leader in the development of a new Blue Economy for the 21st century. A report by FocusMaine in 2016 has predicted that Maine's aquaculture industry "exports to net \$230-\$800 million by 2025."

Investing in our aquaculture sector will help us maintain our working waterfronts and lower our state's carbon footprint. Aquaculture is one of the most efficient and sustainable ways of producing food because of reduced space requirements and smaller feed conversion ratios compared to agriculture on land. And with shellfish and seaweed there is no feeding, watering, or fertilizing that has to be done. Oysters, mussels, scallops, and clams are bivalves which filter seawater. This purifies our waters and keeps them healthy. Seaweed also has great benefits for our environment because as it grows it captures carbon and nitrogen, which helps balance ocean acidity.

We can address climate issues and protect Maine's environment, preserve our state's maritime character for the next generation, and provide good paying jobs all by investing in our state's aquaculture industry. This is a crucial investment into Maine's future. And it could pair with legislation proposed this session to establish a Blue Economy Taskforce that would support Maine's emergence as a center for Blue Economy innovation and opportunity, which has two bipartisan members of this committee as sponsor and cosponsor on it.

All Mainers should have the opportunity to find work along Maine's coast and in the Gulf of Maine. It's part of our state's heritage and will continue, well into the future, to be a crucial part of our state's economy. There is personally no better feeling, and no better way to know you've had a good day, than the smell of the ocean as you traverse across Casco Bay and some mud on your sleeves from lifting bags of oysters out of cages. We need to support Maine's aquaculturists and working waterfront. This bill will provide the necessary investments to put our state's vision into reality.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions.