

131st Legislature
Senate of
Maine
Senate District 2

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**LD 2164, "An Act to Establish the Maine-Ireland Trade Commission
and Improve Collaboration with Ireland"**

**Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development,
Economic Advancement and Business
February 6, 2024**

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business:

My name is Trey Stewart; and I represent Senate District 2, which includes several communities in Penobscot and Aroostook Counties. I am here today to introduce LD 2164, "*An Act to Establish the Maine-Ireland Trade Commission and Improve Collaboration with Ireland.*"

Similar legislation has already been passed into law in New Jersey and West Virginia and several other states are considering the language at this time. As you can see, the Maine-Ireland Trade Commission will consist of nine members appointed by the Governor, the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House. These nine members will work to advance bilateral trade and investment between Maine and Ireland. The bipartisan Commission will also initiate joint action of policy issues of mutual interest to Maine and Ireland and promote business and academic exchanges between the two. Encouraging mutual economic support and encouraging mutual investment in the infrastructure will also be the focus of the commission members.

One point I would like to highlight is that the funds to operate this panel are raised outside of the Legislature, thereby not relying on this body for an appropriation to meet and conduct business. As such, the Commission may raise funds and accept gifts, grants and bequests for purposes of following through with its mission.

To provide you with a bit of background on the impetus of the Ireland Trade Commission legislation, originally it was drafted by a member of the New Jersey American Irish State Legislators Caucus following a trip to Ireland in 2022. Caucus members were very interested in supporting the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement. This legislation is the product of those discussions. With the establishment of the Commission here, we will help communities in Ireland and Maine through the creation of educational, economic, governmental and people-to-people links.

As a result of the Brexit agreement following the United Kingdom's (UK) exit from the European Union (EU), Northern Ireland uniquely now has access to both the UK market of 67 million people and EU market of 450 million people. The Republic of Ireland also has direct access to the EU market. There are 850 US companies based in Ireland using it as a gateway to the EU. Furthermore, Ireland is the ninth largest investor in the US. The Ireland Trade Commission is intended to build on this two-way relationship.

Our state maintains a strong Irish heritage with nearly 16% of Maine's population being of Irish descent. Irish immigrants played a significant role in Maine's history and we should celebrate the contributions and culture of the Irish-American community. This measure presents a tremendous opportunity to foster an international economic development relationship that will no doubt benefit the people in both Maine and Ireland.

Before I wrap up today, I would like to suggest an amendment. Upon reflection and hearing from others who have an interest in this proposal, I would offer language that would change the title to "*An Act to Establish the Maine-Island of Ireland Trade Commission and Improve Collaboration with the Island of Ireland*," and also change all Ireland references to the Island of Ireland. Doing so will encompass the entire island, including the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.