



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler in support of
**LD 2191, An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe
Weather-related Events**

Before the Joint Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business

Good afternoon, Sen. Curry, Rep. Roberts and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. I am Allison Hepler and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. I am here today to speak in support of **LD 2191, An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe Weather-related Events**.

I am sure you have heard and/or seen images of the devastating storms that battered the Maine coast in January. Both of them showed themselves at high tide, tracking southeasterly winds and together they caused damage that has not been seen in Maine for years, if ever. Estimates for rebuilding, assuming that all of the damaged businesses want to rebuild, are being assessed but can be expected to be significant.

Many have been quick to respond. I am grateful to the Department of Environmental Protection for its willingness to streamline permitting for rebuilding under certain circumstances. I am also grateful to Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, Island Institute, Maine Emergency Management Administration, our county partners, and our municipal officials and my fellow coastal legislators.

Many in the industry looking to rebuild are seeking loans, materials and contractors. Never having had to previously deal with FEMA, they are frustrated at the pace of work in declaring a Federal Disaster and many are somewhat mystified by the process, other than "it takes time." I also wish the process could be more expedient.

FEMA promises aid for homeowners and the Small Business Administration promises low- or no-interest loans, but because the majority of economic activity in Maine's marine industries is this spring and summer, fishermen and commercial wharves need immediate relief to get started. LD 2191's proposed grant funding would be more than welcome – it is crucial to these fishermen.

I am confident that the Department of Economic and Community Development has the talent to develop rules and criteria needed in this short time-frame and, importantly, they will also reach out to others. Many in this room have been in the trenches and are committed to these fishing families and communities. I will mention a couple: Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, Island Institute, Maine Lobstermen's Association, the Maine Lobstering Union, the Maine Marine Trades Association and the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association. They are likely situated best to develop criteria that is fair and also timely.

Thank you for your time.

District 49: Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich