

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Olivia Lenfestey and I am an Island Institute Fellow assigned to living and working in the community of Islesboro. I offer this testimony in support of LD 2214 and more specifically in support of one-time additional funding to the Community Resilience Partnership's grant programs and the creation of an Office of Community Affairs.

The increased grant funding and technical support that this supplemental funding would provide small communities is of vital importance to the climate change planning and storm resilience efforts that are currently taking place at the local level. As communities navigate the complex conversations and processes of planning for their future, the CRP has provided much needed funding and resources to aid the success of energy transitions and storm resilience projects in Maine.

The Island Institute Fellowship is a 25 year old program in which recent graduates are placed in Maine's coastal and year-round communities to strengthen capacity for local projects, including planning, education, and management of historical, cultural, natural, and economic resources. Since 2022, I have been working closely with the island's Sea Level Rise Committee as the Communication Manager, doing outreach and planning for an infrastructure adaptation project to increase resilience to current and future flooding at the Narrows, a vulnerable stretch of the island's main road. I am not here to represent the community of Islesboro in full, but rather to speak to my experience of working with the town and members of the community through my Fellowship.

I have seen first hand the effects that the CRP has had on enrolled communities. After enrolling in 2022, Islesboro was awarded a Community Action Grant to hire a Project Manager to help move along our work at The Narrows and has greatly benefited from the support provided by the CRP. Since beginning work with our project manager, our committee has managed to hire and onboard engineers to complete an engineering study and alternative analysis at The Narrows, which, when flooded, is impassable and cuts half of the island off from essential services. With the support of our Project Manager and the CRP, we have amassed community support for this work.

Through my experience working with the community on Islesboro, I now know that the work that is being done in small communities today is by no means small. The decisions that are being made at the local level will greatly impact the livelihoods of future generations, and the stakes are higher now than ever. I am compelled to speak in support of LD 2214 because I have experienced first hand the importance and positive impacts that the Community Resilience Partnership offers small communities in Maine. At a time of unprecedented change due to human caused climate change, investing in the resilience of Maine's communities must be prioritized.

Though we have seen significant progress in recent months, the work of our SLR committee is nowhere near done. The array of vulnerable areas on our island is fresh in our minds following January's storms which caused devastating effects all along our coast. As the committee pivots their focus to address more projects— including the need to adapt Ferry Road, a State owned road that is the only access point to the island's MDOT ferry and main land resources— growing the CRP and approving the proposed supplemental funding would be instrumental in the success of future flooding and climate resilience projects.

Furthermore, expanding the capacity of the Community Resilience Partnership to include 100 new communities would not only benefit the current and future livelihoods of Maine residents, but increase our State's resilience to human caused climate change and increased storms as a whole.

In conclusion, I urge the Committee to support this supplemental funding request to support the ongoing success of the Community Resilience Partnership and invest in the future of Maine's communities.