



**Testimony of Island Institute in Support of LD 2214, An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025**  
March 1, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Stephanie Welch, and I am testifying on behalf of Island Institute in support of LD 2214 and more specifically in support additional funding for the Community Resilience Partnership's (CRP) grant program and establishing the Maine Office of Community Affairs. The three recent storm events that caused significant damage to communities in Maine highlight the urgent need for investment in long-term resilience, coordinated community-based planning and technical assistance to address vulnerabilities to extreme weather events.

Island Institute is a 40-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We work with Maine's island and coastal communities to navigate climate and economic change, expand opportunity and deliver solutions. We work alongside communities, supporting community-driven adaptation and resilience solutions.

While the impact of climate change is felt throughout Maine, island and coastal communities face unique challenges. These communities are on the front line of climate change, yet the challenges they face often exceed the capacity they have to plan and implement climate and adaptation and resilience strategies. Seventy-five percent of Maine's coastal communities have fewer than 3,500 people, and 25 percent of coastal communities have fewer than 800 people. Furthermore, as the Maine Won't Wait climate action plan from the Maine Climate Council notes, only 11 percent of Maine communities have a town planner on staff, and 72 percent have no local planner and insufficient or no regional planning support.

As a CRP service provider, we actively assist communities through the program and have seen the transformative impact these resources have. For example, on Long Island and Chebeague Island CRP funds were instrumental in conducting groundwater sustainability studies—a pivotal step in preserving and maintaining the crucial aquifers on these islands as sea level rise threatens drinking water. The Cranberry Isles used CRP funds to install a solar array system with battery back up on municipal buildings to ensure reliable power critical to the community in the face of extreme storms.

These are just a couple of examples from the 175 communities that have participated in the CRP program since it was launched. Not only have these communities directly benefited from CRP resources, they also serve as models of innovation and hope for others. I cannot over-

emphasize the urgency of providing additional funding to empower more communities to implement real solutions to enhance resilience.

Furthermore, additional CRP funding, in conjunction with the Governor's proposal to establish a Maine Office of Community Affairs, represents a pivotal investment in our state's resilience initiatives and community-based resilience planning. The Legislature endorsed this "one stop shop" approach in 2023, envisioning the Office as a central hub within state government to coordinate planning, technical assistance, and financial support for towns, cities, Tribal governments, and regional entities. This combined strategy is essential to address climate vulnerability challenges facing communities across Maine and will support a coordinated and collaborative approach to accelerate implementation of effective solutions, and foster the development of stronger, more resilient communities in the face of increasingly frequent and extreme weather events.

In conclusion, I urge the Committee to support additional funding for the Community Resilience Partnership's grant programs and the creation of the Maine Office of Community Affairs as part of LD 2214. This investment not only addresses the immediate storm aftermath but also establishes a foundation for a more resilient and sustainable future for Maine's island and coastal communities. Your thoughtful consideration is appreciated.