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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

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Testimony of Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross presenting LD 2225. An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

I am Rachel Talbot Ross, representing House District 118 in Portland, and I have the honor of serving as the Speaker of the House.

With this testimony, I am pleased to present LD 2225. An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events, an emergency bill from the Governor responding to the devastating storm damage to Maine communities this winter.

Storm damage

From assessments compiled by the Maine Emergency Management Agency, we now know that flooding and wind damage from this winter's storms on December 18, January 10 and January 13 caused damage that totaled over \$90 million to public infrastructure in all 16 counties.

The impact of this damage fell disproportionately on working waterfronts and infrastructure of vital riverfront downtown centers critical to the economic livelihoods of many Mainers.

We all saw the pictures of the devastation in the newspapers and in our social media feeds. In the days immediately afterward, I witnessed much of the damage first hand, not only in my home district, but also visiting damaged businesses on the Boothbay peninsula and the severely eroded shorefront roadways and flooded neighborhoods at Old Orchard Beach.

In December, the state's major rivers and their tributaries crested to record flood levels causing acute damage in Farmington, Skowhegan, Waterville, Augusta, Hallowell, and Gardiner in the

Kennebec watershed and in Newry, Rumford, Mexico, Dixfield, Canton, Auburn, and Lewiston in the watershed of the Androscoggin.

Then, in January, ocean storm surges overwhelmed the Route 1 dike in Machias, destroyed four of the eight fishing piers in Milbridge, took out seven wharves in Corea, swept away Gleason's boat shop on Swan's Island, destroyed electrical and fueling systems at the Stonington Lobster Co-op and twice overran the Deer Isle causeway, both times severing the road access of two municipalities from the mainland.

The sea buckled the walls at Brown's boatyard in North Haven, ripped the siding off the Rockland breakwater lighthouse, and destroyed the Potts' Point town landing in Harpswell.

14-foot tides in Portland Harbor brought water downtown onto Commercial Street and surrounded the former baked bean plant, overwhelmed pump stations at Higgins Beach in Scarborough, disassembled the seawall and Camp Ellis pier in Saco, inundated the Ocean Park neighborhood in Old Orchard Beach with four feet of water, overtopped the Drakes Island bridge, and undermined Webhannet Drive in Wells.

Purpose of legislation

In response to the breadth of this unprecedented damage, this bill proposes to provide the state's Infrastructure Adaptation Fund with \$50 million for repairs and improvements that support public safety, protect essential community assets, meet regional economic needs, and build long-term resiliency.

Project types may include working waterfront infrastructure, culverts, storm water systems, water system upgrades and other interventions that support reducing or eliminating climate impacts, especially coastal and inland flooding.

Funds may be used to support project planning and federal matching funds. Funds will be used for *public* infrastructure projects with project exemptions available for *some* types of private infrastructure upgrades with significant community benefits, such as working waterfronts.

Please note also that Maine's federal disaster declaration, approved by President Biden on January 30, now allows federal funding to be used on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation statewide, not just for repairs for damage within the counties impacted by the December storm to which that particular declaration refers.

Infrastructure Adaptation Fund

As some on this committee will recall, on the basis of recommendations of the state's climate action plan, the Maine Infrastructure Adaptation Fund was created by the 130th legislature with one-time funding for competitive grants to leverage federal funding for municipal, regional and state infrastructure adaptation improvements that support public safety and emergency management and infrastructure resiliency.

Since its creation in 2021, the fund has awarded over \$25 million to 50 Maine communities

Communities that have received awards for infrastructure adaptation projects to address flooding along ocean and riverfronts, protect stormwater and wastewater systems, install culverts to reduce flooding; and ensure energy availability during extreme storms are listed in the table attached to my testimony. These communities represent the breadth of the state - from Frenchville to Waterford and from Eastport to Anson.

Social vulnerability and equitable outcomes

The substantial federal funds from the bipartisan infrastructure act already leveraged by the infrastructure adaptation fund have benefitted disadvantaged communities in Maine through President Biden's executive Justice 40 initiative which requires that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal climate, clean energy, affordable and sustainable housing, and other investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.

Maine has concurrently supported this goal with the development of a social vulnerability index which helps identify where vulnerable populations are located within the state and what factors drive those vulnerabilities. Maine's index uses 17 socioeconomic and demographic indicators taken from the US Census data. These indicators include poverty, minority status, people without vehicles, people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited English proficiency.

Conclusion

As this hearing is for a bill from the Governor, I expect that any questions you may have about technical aspects of program implementation will be better addressed in testimony that follows from the executive branch. But I am happy to respond if you have particular questions about my support for this important emergency legislation.

I thank you for your time and attention to the state's most urgent needs.

Grants awarded from Infrastructure Adaptation Fund, 2022-2024					
Projects addressing flooding along ocean and riverfronts and improvements to stormwater, drinking water, and wastewater systems (announced in July 2022)		Culverts (announced in February 2024)		Climate Resiliency (announced in February 2024)	
Anson-Madison	\$842,000	Bar Harbor	\$200,000	Arrowsic	\$50,000
Bath	\$4,000,000	Brownfield	\$200,000	Castine	\$50,000
Berwick	\$1,430,000	Cumberland	\$200,000	Falmouth	\$50,000
Blue Hill	\$1,000,000	Ebeemee Twp	\$200,000	Fayette	\$125,000
Boothbay Harbor	\$4,150,000	Fairfield	\$200,000	Frenchville	\$48,000
Eastport	\$166,000	Frenchville (2)	\$400,000	Hallowell	\$37,000
Frenchville	\$59,000	Lincolnville	\$200,000	Harpswell	\$50,000
Kennebunkport	\$2,590,000	Ludlow	\$200,000	Kennebunkport	\$50,000
Norway	\$100,000	Milton Twp	\$200,000	Mariaville	\$36,000
Ogunquit	\$2,850,000	Naples	\$200,000	Minot	\$50,000
Rockland	\$75,000	Norway	\$200,000	Penobscot	\$50,000
Scarborough	\$60,000	Presque Isle (2)	\$400,000	Poland	\$36,000
Winslow	\$2,740,000	Prospect	\$200,000	Portland	\$120,000
		Randolph	\$200,000	Rockland	\$125,000
		Standish	\$200,000	Southport	\$50,000
		Washington	\$200,000	Stonington	\$125,000
		Waterford	\$200,000	Vienna	\$50,000
		Winslow	\$200,000	Vinalhaven	\$125,000
				Westbrook	\$120,000
Total	\$20,000,000	Total	\$4,000,000	Total	\$1,400,000