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***Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler in support of
LD 2225, An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal
Weather Events***

Before the Joint Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Good afternoon, Sen. Rotundo, Rep. Sachs and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. 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 2225, An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events.**

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 in the millions.

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

But what makes LD 2225 especially welcome is its recognition that our working waterfronts are a significant part of our communities and our state, not only economically but also socially and culturally. According to DMR Commissioner Pat Keliher, the lobster industry alone brought in \$6.1 million last year, the most valuable fishery in Maine. But fishermen need a place to land their catch, and this is what these storms have demolished up and down the coast. As you know, this industry has multiple spinoff economic benefits in our local communities and statewide. To borrow language from LD 2225, this bill will provide "protection of essential community assets."

Many in the fishing 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. Fishermen and commercial wharves need immediate relief to get started. The funding in LD 2225 would be more than welcome – it is crucial to these fishermen.

Many in this room have been in the trenches and are committed to these fishing families and communities. You will hear from many of them. I know you'll listen closely.

Thank you for your time.

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