



M A I N E

Lobstermen's Association, Inc.

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Committee on Appropriations & Financial Affairs
c/o Office of Fiscal and Program Review
5 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

March 6, 2024

In Favor of LD 2225, An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events

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

My name is Kevin Kelley. I am here on behalf of the Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA) to strongly urge you to support LD 2225, An Act to Provide Funding to Rebuild Infrastructure Affected by Extreme Inland and Coastal Weather Events.

The MLA was founded in 1954 and is the oldest fishing industry association on the east coast. Lobstering families are the heart and soul of communities from Washington County to York County. We are essential drivers of a strong Maine economy and indelible symbols of Maine's fishing heritage and culture.

In January, our members, their communities, and working waterfronts were battered by two relentless storms. Significant and historic weather events came back-to-back in one week's time, bringing the state's highest and third highest tides in recorded history, along with severe wind and waves, and heavy rain and snow. These two storms came just a month after days of torrential rains had already caused substantial flooding across the state.

The reality is that only 20 miles of Maine's 5,000-mile coastline serve as working waterfront and just 16 miles are dedicated to commercial fishing activity. More than half of Maine's working waterfront is privately owned. Estimates are that close to 60-percent of our working waterfront infrastructure was lost or severely damaged. Docks were torn apart and entire buildings were

washed away. In Stonington, the state's most valuable lobstering port, estimates are that these storms caused at least \$15 million in damage.

Maine's fishing industry simply cannot work without safe and reliable access to our working waterfront and its infrastructure. Maine's fishing industry will be facing disaster if we are not able to rebuild critical infrastructure in time for our spring/summer fisheries.

LD 2225 would transfer \$50 million from the Maine Budget Stabilization Fund to the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Infrastructure Adaptation Fund for critical infrastructure adaptation, repair, and improvements. There are several critical elements to this bill – adequate funding, timing of the funding, and flexibility to address the most critical needs.

MLA views \$50 million as the minimum investment needed if we hope to meaningfully address the damage to our working waterfronts. The damage is massive and significant investment is required if we are to make a meaningful impact. MLA views Maine DOT's Infrastructure Adaptation Fund as our best chance of getting the funding where it is needed -- and in time -- to provide access to fishermen for our critical spring/summer fishing season.

Importantly, LD 2225 provides the flexibility to address an array of essential public and private infrastructure, prioritizes addressing safety and economic needs, and allows infrastructure to be rebuilt in a manner that will ensure resiliency when faced with future storms. Given how limited our working waterfront is when fully operational, it is essential that key infrastructure is functioning as soon as possible.

Maine faces a daunting task in its work to overcome the damage caused by this series of natural disasters. The MLA is proud to stand with our fishing industry partners in support of LD 2225. Members of the Appropriations Committee, the Legislature and the Governor, and our federal officials can work together to get Maine's coastline back on its feet without delay and avoid a fisheries disaster. The MLA looks forward to working with you to make this happen.

Thank you.