



February 24, 2025

The Honorable Denise Tepler, Senate Chair
The Honorable Vitoria Doudera, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources
State House, Room 216
Augusta, ME. 04333

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, Honorable members of the Joint Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Sebastian Belle and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA). The MAA is the oldest state aquaculture association in the country. We represent Maine's aquatic farmers that raise finfish, shellfish and sea vegetables. Our businesses and the plants and animals we have a stewardship responsibility for, are intimately and directly linked to the environment they are immersed in. We depend on clean healthy environments to maintain the health and welfare of the plants and animals we grow, and it is the high quality of Maine's environment and its clean cool waters that allow us to produce what is widely recognized as the highest quality seafood in the market. Simply put, our farmers depend on healthy aquatic ecosystems to grow healthy food for America.

I stand before you today to testify in support of LD 401 "An Act to Support Removal of Overboard Discharge Systems". As some of you may remember MAA has come before this committee repeatedly over the years to advocate for the elimination of Overboard Discharge Systems often referred to as "OBD's. Although the State and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) have made progress on the elimination of these systems thousands of them remain and Maine continues to have the highest number of OBDs of any state in the country. OBDs, even if they are functioning correctly, trigger automatic precautionary closures of tens of thousands of acres of Maine waters to shellfish harvesting.

Over the years the legislature has made a number of changes to state law that have resulted in programs designed to eliminate OBDs where technically feasible. As DEP has implemented these programs several issues have come to light and LD 401 attempts to deal with some of these. LD 401 seeks to modify the income thresholds linked to these programs away from fixed levels to a linkage to the state's median income. This is an important improvement to the program because the original fixed levels are out of date and fixed. In addition, LD 401 requires mandatory disclosure of the presence of an OBD during a property transfer, modifies the definition of "significant action" and makes a number of other technical changes designed to improve the existing programs.

The State of Maine has a long tradition of seeking practical and fair solutions to policy challenges. MAA Supports LD 401 and urges the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 401.

Thank you for your attention, I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Belle", written in a cursive style.

Sebastian M. Belle
Executive Director