



**Testimony of Island Institute in Support of LD 1 An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for
Maine's Communities, Homes and Infrastructure**

February 11, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee, my name is Nick Battista, and I am testifying on behalf of Island Institute in support of LD 1.

Island Institute is a 42-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We boldly navigate climate and economic change with island and coastal communities to expand opportunities and deliver solutions. The "with" in our mission is essential - we collaborate and partner with Maine communities and businesses in all our work. Much of our work takes place in communities highly dependent on fishing, and most of these communities are east of Damariscotta.

Maine's island and coastal communities sit on the front lines of climate change and are experiencing extreme weather events, such as the recent devastating storms, with increasing frequency. Flooding roadways and washed-out culverts threaten to cut communities off from essential services and weaken local economies. Rising seas are jeopardizing drinking water, and stormwater systems are overwhelmed. These challenges exceed the financial capacity of Maine's small, rural coastal and island communities.

These communities are small, which further strains their capacity to address these challenges. Seventy-five percent of Maine's coastal communities have fewer than 3,800 people, and 25 percent have fewer than 850 people. These small communities regularly find it challenging to find enough volunteers to be on the select board and involved in other committees. Many of these communities do not have a land use planner on staff or capacity beyond the town manager or administrator to plan for or develop advanced strategies for resiliency.

When the two storms hit our coast last January, many communities we work with sustained significant damage to public and private infrastructure. We immediately started hearing from communities and businesses who had significant questions about what to do and where to get good information.

We partnered with DECD, DMR, and MEMA on a webinar the week after the storm that had 1000 people register and provided various information to those impacted. We were lucky that we were able to reach State agency partners and help provide a platform for them to share information directly with communities. Future disasters will likely need more support for this

kind of information sharing. Providing the resources to strengthen and improve the emergency management system will help increase preparedness and reduce the impact of future events.

Last year, Maine's island communities banded together to apply successfully for a FEMA BRIC grant. Initiated by the Town of Vinalhaven, this project unites Maine's unbridged islands in a collaborative effort to strengthen resilience against climate challenges that impact critical resources and local economies. Participating islands will assess priority resilience challenges, develop actionable solutions, and establish clear steps for implementation. The project will leverage shared learning, expertise, and cost efficiencies to support the resilience goals of participating islands.

To support this effort and align it with the state's climate initiatives, Island Institute leveraged GOPIF's CRP Service Provider Track 2 opportunity, which provides individualized vulnerability assessments for community projects. By adopting the same methodologies and strategies as the BRIC Project, this CRP work offers communities a proactive opportunity to establish their resilience priorities ahead of the BRIC project's full rollout.

FEMA is providing about \$355,000, while the local cost share is \$111,000. Coming up with the match for this grant was challenging for the communities involved, and Island Institute is providing nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the necessary match. These are absolutely critical conversations for communities to start. As these communities move from planning to implementation, funding will likely be a significant challenge, and additional financing options in the State will be welcome.

Establishing a State Resiliency Office will allow for greater coordination, communication, and assistance for communities to address the negative impacts of extreme weather exacerbated by climate change. Centralizing this work in the newly developed Maine Office of Community Affairs will ensure that resiliency will be entrenched in programs that support Maine's communities most vulnerable to climatic impacts. The staff positions contained in LD 1 are particularly critical to providing additional support to Maine's communities as they work to understand their options and implement solutions that make them more resilient. This is a complex area of work for small communities to tackle alone.

In conclusion, I urge the Committee to support LD 1. The communities in which we work will benefit significantly from this legislation. Your thoughtful consideration is appreciated.