



Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony in Support of LD1

An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes & Infrastructure

February 11, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Cathy Breen, and I am the Director of Government Affairs with Maine Conservation Voters. MCV is building a just, thriving future for all by acting on the climate crisis, protecting the environment, and safeguarding our democracy.

I speak today in support of *LD1, An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes and Infrastructure*. I have mixed feelings about the need for this bill. On the one hand, I'm saddened to see the devastation that recent severe storms have left in their wake in so many Maine cities and towns.¹ On the other hand, I applaud Governor Mills and the leaders of all four legislative caucuses for setting aside partisanship and working together to collaborate on the very first bill of the 132nd Legislature. This collaboration not only sets a positive, bi-partisan tone to this new session, it recognizes that recovering from extreme storm damage, emergency management and infrastructure resilience are not partisan issues but rather a core function of state government.

There is no corner of Maine that is safe from the severe weather we've seen in recent years and serious conditions that are predicted in the future.² Battered working waterfronts, washed out roads and bridges, shorelines and rivers overflowing into nearby buildings and farms - in recent years we've seen all of these at a scale not seen previously in our lifetimes. The damage left in the wake of these storms poses a serious threat to Maine's marine economy, a sector that grew 22% more businesses from 2010-2021 and increased 42% in average wages in marine industries in the same decade.³ In addition, far too many Maine homes have suffered from flooding, damaged roofs, and other storm damage. All of these events have left not only emotional scars but far-reaching economic impacts on the communities where they've occurred.

In the wake of three severe weather events from December 2023 through January 2024, which together caused an estimated \$90,000,000 in damage to public infrastructure and

¹ <https://www.soundingonline.com/features/the-new-normal>

² <https://sealevelrise.org/states/maine/>

³ <https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/marine-economy-maine.pdf>

additional damage to private property, Governor Mills signed an Executive Order creating the State of Maine Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission. Comprised mainly of generous volunteers, the Commission traveled the state, visiting towns in the mountains, along the coast, and in the valleys of our major rivers, bearing witness to the scale and ferocity of recent storms and the wreckage they left behind. In addition, the Commission held listening sessions with local businesses, emergency responders, municipal, county and state administrators, engineers, construction professionals, social service providers who work with our neighbors who live with disabilities and mobility challenges, and more. This work culminated in the Commission's Interim Report in November, 2024,⁴ and LD1 is the first step in fulfilling the recommendations that the Commission put forward.

LD1 provides several concrete measures to improve Maine's readiness for severe weather:

1. It establishes and funds the "Home Resiliency Fund" by moving \$15 million from unexpectedly high reserve accounts in the Bureau of Insurance;
2. It sets up the "Home Resiliency Program" and lays out some basic provisions for distribution of the aforementioned funds to certain Maine homeowners;
3. It establishes the "Safeguarding Tomorrow through Ongoing Risk Mitigation Revolving Loan Fund" in order to provide state matching funds to several existing federal programs. These programs make low-interest loans available not to homeowners but rather to Maine municipalities and indigenous communities for emergency preparedness and storm resilience. Funding for this program comes from various special revenue funds on a one-time basis. But the revolving nature of the program will keep the funds flowing out and back in over time. MCV would like to see Maine counties have access to these loans, given their role in emergency management.
4. Supports improved statewide emergency communications systems, and communications training and education;
5. Establishes the State Resilience Office with the Maine Office of Community Affairs and funds the office with a transfer of funds from the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation

MCV would like to draw your attention to one provision that matters a lot to us - the eligibility of owners of only permanent residences for participation in the Home Resiliency Program. We believe Maine's limited taxpayer dollars should not be used on vacation homes but rather where Maine families live most of their lives. In addition, I understand that the Mills administration is working on a provision to target homeowners of modest means for this fund and avoid using limited tax dollars on the homes of Maine's wealthy; we support that effort as well.

In conclusion, MCV supports LD1, and we will continue to work with this committee and the Mills administration to help Maine families and communities weather the storms that are on the horizon. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

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