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Testimony of Representative Valli Geiger sponsoring

LD 1182, An Act to Grant the Rockland Port District an Increase in Its Borrowing Capacity and Include Sustainable Aquaculture and Marine Industries in Its Charter

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

Good morning, Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and esteemed colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation. My name is Valli Geiger and I represent House District 42, which includes the city of Rockland, most of the town of Owls Head and the Islands of North Haven, Matinicus Isle, Criehaven Township and the Muscle Ridge Islands. I am here to present **LD 1182, An Act to Grant the Rockland Port District an Increase in Its Borrowing Capacity and Include Sustainable Aquaculture and Marine Industries in Its Charter.**

The Rockland Port District was established by the Legislature almost 75 years ago. Originally, Captain Richard J Spears worked with the Maine Port Authority to establish ferry services from Rockland to the Penobscot Bay islands. Captain Spears was hired as the first employee of the Maine State Ferry services in 1959. When all of the District's waterfront land was turned over to the state, Captain Spears built an adjacent floating dock facility to provide a home port for Maine's windjammer fleet. Fast forward to 2025, Windjammer Wharf is located on Captain Richard Spears Drive and Maine's second newest ferry is the M/V Captain Richard Spears.

Rockland Port District is a corporate body politic with the ability to maintain its finances self-sufficiently. In all of its 75 years, the District has never taxed Rockland property owners nor sought loan guarantees from the state or the city. Revenues have been raised by docking fees and a collaborative relationship with schooner vessel owners.

A few years ago, the windjammer fleet was threatened by the sale of the North End Shipyard. The shipyard has the only marine railway that can pull out wood schooners without damaging their hulls. When the District attempted to buy the property, despite good cash flow and willing lenders, it was eliminated due to a debt cap of \$600,000. Fortunately, the property was sold to investors who retained the precious marine railway, but the District realized an increase of borrowing capacity is critical for future waterfront projects.

Currently, the future of a major wharf and waterfront property is in question because the owner, Dragon Cement, has hit financial difficulties. The Rockland Port District and the City of

House District 42: Criehaven Township, Matinicus Isle, Muscle Ridge Islands, North Haven,
Part of Owls Head, Rockland

Rockland want to partner in purchasing the property to save both the El Farro Memorial park and the deep-water wharf for renewed commercial development. The borrowing cap increase and Charter change would enable the District to advance the interests of Rockland's citizens and preserve our working waterfront.

Thank you for your consideration on this bill. I am happy to take questions, though I may defer to Tom Marshall, a member of the Rockland Port District and Tom Luttrell, Rockland's City Manager, who are here today and can provide additional information.

Windjammer Wharf
October 16, 2024

