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Testimony of Representative Holly Eaton in support of
**LD 1341, Resolve, Directing the Department of Marine Resources to
Evaluate How to Effectively Allow 2 Licensed Individuals to Fish for
Lobsters or Scallops from a Single Vessel**
Before the Marine Resources Committee

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Representative Holly Eaton, and I represent House District 15, which includes many of our working waterfront communities: Deer Isle, Stonington, Brooklin, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Swan's Island, Frenchboro, Isle au Haut and Vinalhaven.

I want to thank Senator Grohoski for bringing forward **LD 1341, Resolve, Directing the Department of Marine Resources to Evaluate How to Effectively Allow 2 Licensed Individuals to Fish for Lobsters or Scallops from a Single Vessel**. I see this as a bill that reflects the reality of our changing coastal economy and the lived experience of fishermen across Maine.

As most of you know, I come from a fishing family, and I've worked as a sternman myself. I've seen firsthand the challenges and sacrifices that come with this way of life — and how much heart and grit our fishermen bring to their work.

The structure of the lobster fishery hasn't seen substantive updates in over 20 years. But in that time, the fishery itself has changed dramatically. One of the most pressing issues is that it has become increasingly difficult to find and retain sternmen. That's due in part to the rising cost of living in coastal communities — housing is out of reach for many working families, and sternmen often can't make enough to build a future here. Some are leaving the fishery altogether; others are diversifying into seasonal work or juggling multiple jobs to get by.

At the same time, we are seeing the toll this instability takes on mental health. Our fishing communities have been hit hard by substance use and addiction — and that is not separate from the economic and social pressures our coastal towns are facing. When people are struggling to afford a home, support a family or find stability in their work, it's no surprise that some are pulled into crisis.

District 15: Brooklin, Deer Isle, Eagle Island Township, Frenchboro, Southwest Harbor, Stonington, Swan's Island, Tremont, Isle au Haut, Vinalhaven

These challenges are not theoretical. They are playing out every day, in real time. And what we're seeing now is more and more licensed fishermen heading out alone — hauling traps or dragging for scallops without help, because they have no other choice. Fishing alone is terrifying. It's unsafe. And it leaves families and communities constantly fearing the worst.

We often hear the phrase “graying of the fleet.” And while it's true that fewer young people are entering the industry, it's also true that we have a generation of fishermen who have weathered the ups and downs of Maine's fisheries for decades. They've earned the right to stay in the fishery — and to stay safe while doing it.

LD 1341 offers a practical solution: allow two licensed lobster or scallop harvesters to fish from the same vessel at the same time. This is a smart, safety-focused update that allows fishermen to collaborate while still preserving the integrity of our licensing system. It also opens the door to conversations we're already having about the trap tag system and vessel limits. This bill should be seen as part of a broader, proactive dialogue — one in which fishermen are actively participating to strengthen and protect the fishery for future generations.

As a member of this committee, and someone who has lived and worked this life, I believe this bill reflects the best kind of policymaking: grounded in real experience, driven by community need and oriented toward a safer future.

I urge you to support LD 1341 so that we can give fishermen the tools they need to adapt, survive, and thrive.