



**University of Maine System Testimony**  
**Regarding LD 1433, Resolve, to Establish a Working Waterfront Infrastructure**  
**Engineer Corps Pilot Program and to Conduct a Feasibility Study of a Higher**  
**Education Service Corps Program — Presented by Gayle Zydlewski,**  
**UMaine Director of Maine Sea Grant— April 24, 2025**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Gayle Zydlewski. I am the Director of the Maine Sea Grant College Program at the University of Maine.

Maine Sea Grant is a federal-state partnership program based at UMaine, with members of our team located in coastal communities from Wells to Eastport. We are one of 34 NOAA Sea Grant programs in coastal and Great Lakes states that receive funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This funding is matched by our public university's already-constrained budgetary resources and other sources of support, including industry and state research and development funding.

Since 1971, we have helped to create and sustain thousands of jobs through science and education that support the sustainable development, management, and stewardship of Maine's marine and coastal resources. For every \$1 of federal investment, Maine Sea Grant supports programs and services that generate \$15 in economic activity in the state, resulting in a total impact of \$23.5 million in Maine in 2023. Our current activities include coastal workforce and business development, hands-on PK-16 marine science education and outreach, research with governmental and industry partners to inform lobster and other fisheries management, and storm preparedness technical assistance for working waterfronts.

All of our work is conducted in partnership and in direct response to the needs of the communities we serve. As a result, over the last few years, our service has increasingly focused on coastal resilience. Through our community conversations, particularly since the destructive coastal storms of the winter of 2023-24, we have consistently heard a need for access to engineering solutions and services.

To address these and other community requests, in 2024, Maine Sea Grant worked with UMaine colleagues, including in the Civil Engineering program, and the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to secure a major NOAA Resilience award, a project now known as Resilient Maine. Leveraging this federal funding, we are engaging relevant UMaine faculty, staff, and students to meet the needs of coastal communities, particularly as it relates to climate hazards, resiliency planning, sea level rise, coastal flooding, and coastal storms. For example, Maine Sea Grant will hire a new staff person who will collaborate closely with a new faculty member in Civil Engineering. Together, they will

work to meet local needs in coastal hazards and infrastructure solutions.

We had already anticipated recruiting and mentoring undergraduate and graduate students to participate in research experiences to assist with coastal community resilience, engineering and infrastructure design, and risk assessment. However, the Engineer Corps Pilot Program proposed in this bill would enhance and expand these planned activities and allow for a greater focus on hands-on service projects that deliver real-world engineering solutions that Maine communities could otherwise not afford. This is consistent with UMaine's commitment to being a learner-centered R1 institution that prepares our students for success in the Maine workforce while also providing direct service to our state.

If the bill passes with funding, Maine Sea Grant would be able to support five students annually during the two-year pilot and provide the required reporting, along with recommendations for the future.

Additionally, on behalf of the University of Maine System (UMS), I would like to convey our commitment to participating in a study into the feasibility of establishing a public higher education service corps, as detailed in Section 4 of the bill. Public service, after all, is a cornerstone of our System's tripartite mission that also includes teaching and research, and the three are often integrated with many of our degree programs, requiring a service learning component (for example, the free legal aid provided by University of Maine School of Law student attorneys). According to a recent survey of UMaine alumni, 70% who live in Maine reported volunteering within the past year, compared to 35% of Maine's overall population. The service corps envisioned by this bill would provide another pathway for UMS students to make meaningful contributions to our communities.

We thank Representative Rielly and the cosponsors of LD 1433 for recognizing the role of Maine Sea Grant and our public universities more broadly in addressing the needs of our state, especially its coastal communities. Thank you for your ongoing support of your System and its students, and I look forward to answering your questions.