



**Letter to the Committee on Housing and Economic Development - in Support of LD 1336 - An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council**

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Dear Senator Curry, Representative Gere and Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee:

My name is Hugh Cowperthwaite, I am a resident of Falmouth, and I am here to speak in support of LD 1336. I am a current member of the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council (MASSAC), having been duly appointed by Governor Mills in May 2024.

I first learned about Aomori, Japan when I was invited to participate in a delegation to visit Aomori in October 2010 to represent Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) where I continue to be employed to this day. In my role of Senior Program Director for CEI's Fisheries and Aquaculture Program, I am always on the lookout for opportunities for diversifying Maine's fisheries.

On the trip in 2010, our goal was to learn about Aomori's energy practices and fisheries and share our experiences from Maine. I spent the next several days learning about Aomori's robust commercial scallop farming industry centered around Mutsu Bay. I had never seen anything like it. The people, their kindness, care and attention to detail all in the name of seafood production - I was truly amazed and inspired.

My mind was racing, and I said to myself "we can do this in Maine". I made friends quickly with our Japanese hosts and began making plans to host some guests in Maine.

Since that first trip in 2010 I have helped many aquaculture and commercial fishing businesses in Maine by leveraging the opportunity I was given to visit Aomori and the contacts I've made. As a result, businesses have been launched and farmed (native) Atlantic Sea scallops are now available in Maine. There is no other farmed scallop like it on the national market. It's unique and fetches a premium price for our Maine growers. We have created a new fishery to help Maine's marine economy diversify.

To this day I remain connected with friends and businesses in Aomori and have branched up into Hokkaido. I have now visited Japan four times and each time I have brought commercial fishermen and aquaculturists from Maine with me (now totaling 25 people). Learning has expanded beyond sea scallops, and we are now learning about farmed and wild harvested kelp, seaweed and most recently sea urchins.

The Maine Aomori relationship is a treasure for our state, and we should continue to foster our international connections now more than ever. I urge your support with this modest request to create in statute the MASSAC and provide support to the Maine International Trade Center for administering the Council.

Sincerely,

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