



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, Distinguished Members of the Marine Resources Committee:

I am Will Tuell. I represent House District 10, which includes nearly 20 small communities in central and coastal Washington County. I am here today to wholeheartedly endorse LD 1708, a bill sponsored by my colleague and friend, Rep. Strout, who ably serves Western Washington County in the 132nd Legislature.

When you ride to and from Washington County together every week, you have a chance to kick ideas, bills, and proposals around. Rep. Strout and I have had many such opportunities during our white-knuckle trips to and from the Down East coast this winter and spring, and it was one such trip, I believe, that begat this bill.

Chet and Aaron Barrett had lost their lives at sea while bringing their scallop boat back home. I did not know the Barretts but have known several fishermen who went overboard while out hauling traps or dragging for scallops. Downeast, it is an unspoken part of the lifestyle, a risk that goes with the job, one which irrevocably devastates the lives of all who knew those lost.

We all remember the death of 18-year-old Tylar Michaud a couple years back. Tylar had graduated from high school in June only to lose his life hauling traps two months later. His great-aunt, the Honorable Joyce Maker, who once chaired this committee, and who served on it with myself and Rep. Hepler, kept me posted on the search and recovery effort. To say that was a harrowing ordeal for those involved would be an understatement. To say that Marine Patrol and the various agencies that assisted with the search did not go above and beyond would also be wrong. --

We have some incredible people on the water, whose mission it is to leave no fisherman at sea. They truly and sincerely take every shipwreck personally and will do whatever they can to bring a loved one home, whether it be a rescue or, all too often, a recovery.

So when Rep. Strout was, like many in the community, searching for answers, and ways to be of help, following the Barretts' shipwreck, I listened, and suggested something I rarely ever suggest – an after deadline bill.

Rarely is there a true need for a late filed request, but we both agreed that the Barretts death, and the discussion that came from it, was a worthy case in point.

That bill has been many things since it was first brought to Legislative Council, but the finished product, before you today as LD 1708, offers us an opportunity to do something proactive and positive for the commercial fishermen who put their lives on the line every day.

This bill sets up a fund for badly needed equipment and response efforts in the case of a shipwreck. In recognition of the fact that times are tight here at the State House, it is designed in such a way that fishermen, the community at large, and anyone with a generous heart can donate funds to assist in timely search, rescue, and recovery efforts.

The fishing community rallied around the Barrett family, stepped up in a big way to bring divers and equipment to the scene of the shipwreck. Many feel, and rightly so, that the state should have such a fund already established – a fund which, if you'll pardon my editorializing against sites like GoFundMe – does not exploit grieving communities, families, and Mainers' goodwill.

By establishing this fund, and allowing people to donate to it, we are offering the entire coast – and beyond – a way to help out in a time of crisis. Beyond that, we are saying that it is our goal, as a state, to invest in the technology, resources, and training needed to reduce the number of lives lost at sea, or, failing that, to recover those lost at sea as quickly as possible.

I urge you to join me in supporting LD 1708 and standing with the men and women who make a living at sea.