



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Representative Holly Eaton in support of*  
**LD 1708 – An Act to Create the Commercial Fishing Safety Fund to Further  
Develop Training and Provide Equipment to Recover Ships and Other**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources*

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and esteemed colleagues of the Marine Resources Committee, my name is Representative Holly Eaton, and I represent House District 15 — a district of fishing and island communities including Deer Isle, Stonington, Brooklin, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Frenchboro, Swan's Island, Isle au Haut, and Vinalhaven. These are places where fishing isn't just a job — it's how we feed our families, raise our kids and hold our communities together.

I want to thank Representative Strout for submitting this very important and thoughtful bill. LD 1708 speaks to something every one of us on the coast knows too well: the risks our fishermen face every time they leave the dock. We have all felt the loss when someone doesn't come back.

Throughout this session, we've heard testimony again and again about the realities of working on the water — not just the dangers, but the isolation. We've heard about the difficulty of keeping and retaining crew, the increasing pressure on captains to fish alone, and the deep concern that if something goes wrong out there, there may be no one there to help.

This bill is a meaningful and necessary step forward. It creates a dedicated Commercial Fishing Safety Fund to help support both training and equipment that could save lives — not just for fishermen, but for those involved in search and recovery efforts. It would allow the Department of Marine Resources to better respond when things go wrong, while also helping fishermen better prepare and protect themselves before they ever leave shore.

I also appreciate that this bill includes a requirement to consult with the Commercial Fishing Safety Council, ensuring that those with direct experience — those who've lived these emergencies — have a say in how the funds are used.

And as this committee considers the bill, I ask that we keep in mind our owner-operator model here in Maine. This isn't about large versus small operations — we are all independent. And that independence, while a source of pride, can also mean limited access to resources, training, or

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

backup when something goes wrong. LD 1708 offers critical support to the people and communities who need it most.

We have a chance here to turn lived experience — and in some cases, deep grief — into action. This bill responds to the needs we've heard directly from the fishing community. It's collaborative, it's practical, and it's about saving lives. I encourage this committee to vote in support of LD 1708.