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Testimony of Representative Morgan Rielly in support of
LD 1858, An Act to Promote Local Seafood in Schools
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Morgan Rielly, and I represent House District 127, which includes part of Westbrook. I am here today as the lead cosponsor and a strong supporter of **LD 1858, An Act to Promote Local Seafood in Schools**, and I want to thank Senate President Daughtry for introducing this forward-thinking bill.

As someone who has spent time working on oyster farms in Casco Bay and advocating for the future of our working waterfronts, I see this bill as a natural extension of that mission.

There's also support for local seafood in our schools. In Westbrook, our high school partnered with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute to promote local fish consumption with our students. The program works with teachers in the classroom to educate students on the benefits of eating fish for health and local economies, as well as promoting fish in our cafeterias. The partnership started during the pandemic when restaurants closed down and fishermen needed a market for their catch. **LD 1858** supports what our schools, like Westbrook High School, want.

LD 1858 is about more than just what's on the lunch tray – it's about creating stronger connections between two of Maine's most important institutions: our schools and our fishing communities. Maine seafood is renowned around the world, yet many students across our state don't have regular access to it in their school meals. That's not for lack of interest or effort – schools are doing incredible work with limited resources. But there's still room to grow. This bill helps by providing the tools, funding and training to make it easier for more schools to bring fresh, local seafood to the lunchroom – connecting students with one of Maine's most iconic and nutritious food sources.

This proposal will help expand markets for our fishermen, aquaculture producers and processors – providing them with more local buyers and greater price stability. At the same time, it helps cultivate a new generation of Maine seafood lovers by introducing students to fresh, local

seafood in their school cafeterias. That's how we build a resilient seafood economy and a culture that values the people and traditions that sustain it.

This is exactly the kind of smart, place-based policy that Maine should be leading on. It supports jobs on the coast, strengthens food security inland and ensures that the next generation of Mainers grows up knowing the value of the waters that surround us.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I urge this committee to join me in supporting **LD 1858**.