



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



HEATHER JOHNSON
COMMISSIONER

April 27, 2023

Senator Henry Ingwersen
Representative Bill Pluecker
Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Committee, I am writing in support of LD 1670, *An Act to Strengthen Maine's Agriculture, Food and Forest Economy by Funding the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund and Amending Related Provisions of Law*.

The Maine Agriculture, Food & Forest Products Investment Fund was established during the 130th legislature under LD 1733 (P.L. 2021, ch. 483, §§ KK-1-3), *An Act To Provide Allocations for the Distribution of State Fiscal Recovery Funds*. The bill before you seeks to allocate funding for this new initiative and essential staffing resources. We understand the bill appropriates \$20,000,000 per year to the fund as ongoing appropriations that will lapse unless funds are encumbered. It also directs the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to collaborate with the Department of Economic and Community Development to ensure that investment objectives are appropriately targeted and not duplicative and to establish various grant and loan instruments as part of the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund.

The Department agrees with our colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry with respect to the critical need for substantial infrastructure investment across Maine's agriculture, food, and forest products sectors. Bolstering local infrastructure will strengthen our economy by diminishing supply chain vulnerability, foster business activity, grow opportunities for rural communities, and facilitate climate change resilience.

Capitalizing this fund is consistent with several of Maine's economic development goals, as described in Maine's 10-year Economic Development Strategy:

1. "Pursuing opportunities for sustainable fishing, such as aquaculture, to complement traditional fishing and meet the growing demand for a traceable food supply that is changing the way we fish and farm." "Supporting the continued growth of bio-based alternative products that emerge from the intersection of wood supply, bioplastic, and advanced building material technologies."

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Funding is needed to support Maine's sustainable fishing and aquaculture industry to help alleviate the world's growing protein deficit, and funding is needed to support Maine's forest economy as it evolves and diversifies, elevating Maine's key position in developing solutions to meet shifting global demand.

LD 1670 also aligns well with DECD's Domestic Trade Pilot Program, which was funded by the Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan and aims to help Maine businesses increase sales of goods and services to customers within the United States.

In summary, we agree that Maine needs strategic investment in our agriculture, food, and forest products infrastructure, and we welcome the opportunity to fully fund this historic investment in Maine agriculture and forestry products. We thank Speaker Talbot Ross for bringing the bill forward and we look forward to continuing to work with the sponsor and the committee on this proposal.

Thank you for your time, and your consideration of this bill.

Victoria Foley

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