



**Testimony of the Island Institute in Support of LD 142,
An Act to Fund Climate-related Service Work**

January 31, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Stephanie Welch, and I am offering this testimony on behalf of the Island Institute in support of LD 142.

The Island Institute is a 40-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We work to sustain Maine's island and coastal communities and are committed to a just, resilient, and vibrant future for the coast of Maine. We work in partnership with leaders in these communities to support resiliency in the face of a changing world. The Island Institute's community development work focuses on the marine economy, climate and energy solutions, small business, education, and leadership.

The Island Institute participates in the Maine Climate Council process, and our staff serve on various workgroups. One important perspective we bring to this work is an understanding of the needs and capacity constraints of small communities. Seventy-five percent of Maine's coastal communities have fewer than 3,500 people, and 25 percent of coastal communities have fewer than 800 people. Further, only around one in ten Maine communities have a town planner on staff, and nearly three-quarters have no local planner and insufficient or no regional planning support. Throughout our state, rural communities face significant capacity challenges to climate resilience planning and implementation.

For more than 20 years, the Island Institute's Fellows Program has provided support for Maine's island and coastal communities while providing opportunities for recent graduates to apply their skills. We have found that fellows who work within energy transitions, sea level rise preparedness, or other climate related areas tend to go into work or further education in this field with around 50% staying in the state of Maine. We've also noticed a growing trend of host communities from Eastport to Casco Bay applying for fellowships focused on climate-based issues. In our current recruitment, we're receiving inquiries from communities outside of our service area seeking fellows to help advance climate solutions.

Providing ongoing funds to support Climate Corps Program leadership positions and participants will greatly increase the state's capacity to achieve the goals of the Maine Won't Wait climate action plan, while also adding capacity to plan and implement climate resilient solutions. This is particularly important to Maine's most vulnerable communities. I support Maine's Climate Corps and implore you to approve LD 142.

