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Senator Mark Lawrence
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Energy,
Utilities, and Technology
52 Wildbrook Lane
Elliot, ME 03903

Representative Seth Berry
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Energy,
Utilities, and Technology
P.O. Box 117
Richmond, ME 04357

Dear Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology:

I am Jacob Ward, a research engineer at the Advanced Structures and Composites Center, here to speak in support of LD 336, “An Act To Encourage Research To Support the Maine Offshore Wind Industry.”

I was born and raised in Hampden, Maine, and I am an alumna of the University of Maine. At UMaine, I studied mechanical engineering and was fortunate enough to be involved with the offshore wind project beginning in 2009. As graduation approached, like many young Mainers, I felt a growing desire to get out and see the world along with my eagerness to graduate. To put it bluntly, I grew tired of living in the same 20-mile radius my entire life, and I was ready for a change. The University of Michigan offered me a graduate assistantship in their Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering program, so I packed up and moved across the country to begin my master’s degree. Shortly after, I began to realize how much I missed the state of Maine. Living in Michigan helped to put everything in perspective. Hindsight proved that Maine was the place that I wanted to be.

Meanwhile, I had been keeping track of the developments in the offshore wind program back home in Maine, including the nation’s first commercial-scale floating project in the U.S. and the commissioning of the state-of-the-art ocean engineering laboratory. The idea of applying the set of marine engineering skills I had developed to a project back home was very appealing. Fortunately, UMaine offered me a Ph.D. position working on offshore wind. I have since finished school and am heavily involved in the technical side of offshore wind development in the state.

The beginning of this story is not unique to me. Many of my friends, family, and colleagues left the state in search of something different. Unfortunately, the lack of opportunities will prevent many of them from returning. I am very fortunate to work for a global leader in my field and live in my home state. I can confidently say that I would still be in Michigan or elsewhere without UMaine’s offshore wind program.

From my perspective, the proposed research array represents the next step towards building an offshore wind industry in Maine. For a long time, the realization of offshore wind in the United States has been “right around the corner.” What was once theoretical is becoming a reality, with new projects popping up along the East Coast. The environmental and economic benefits of offshore wind have been discussed before this committee many times now. We can already start to see indicators of these benefits with the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between New England Aqua Ventus, LLC. and labor unions regarding the role of Maine workers in developing a 10+ M.W. demonstration project off the coast of Monhegan Island. However, the full realization of these benefits is dependent on the commercialization of offshore wind. In that regard, a research array is the next logical step towards creating an industry in Maine. More importantly, the proposed research array puts the people of Maine in the driver’s seat and will allow us to shape the industry in a way that benefits all of us.

In summary, the proposed research array will launch Maine into the next phase in building a sustainable offshore wind industry, creating many diverse, well-paying jobs. The state’s workforce needs young, talented workers. Hopefully, the opportunities created by this project will allow others, like me, to return home and live “the way life should be.” Thus, I think of offshore wind not only as an investment in Maine’s environmental future but the future workforce as well.

For these reasons, I urge this committee to support LD 336. I would be pleased to address any questions you may have. Thank you for your time.

Best,

Jacob C. Ward