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President of the Senate

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***Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry introducing
LD 1, “An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes and
Infrastructure”
Before the Joint Standing Committee Housing and Economic Development***

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Mattie Daughtry, and I proudly serve as President of the Maine State Senate, where I am honored to represent Senate District 23, which includes Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island and part of Yarmouth. I stand before you today to present LD 1, “An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes and Infrastructure.”

You will remember, a little over one year ago, communities across the state, inland and coastal, were hit with a barrage of wind, snow, rain and ice. Downeast, parts of the state reported hurricane-force winds during the storm’s peak. Bangor reached 60+ mph gusts for several hours. Over 400,000 Mainers lost power. The snowmelt, heavy rain, frozen ground and recent rainfall combined produced the worst river flooding since the 1800s in Maine. The effects were devastating and communities are still working to rebuild.

In my own district, Chebeague Island Boat Yard suffered severe erosion and damage to their pier, marine railway, launch ramp and more. This impacted access for fishing boats and the fueling barge, crucial for supplying Chebeague with gas and heating oil. Without safe and reliable wharves, docks and ramps, Maine’s fishing communities grind to a halt, and that’s what we saw happen on this small island community in Senate District 23, just as it did for working waterfront communities across the state.

In the face of this devastation, Gov. Mills acted quickly, directing her Administration to distribute \$60 million in storm relief as soon as it became available— an unprecedented investment aimed at supporting our recovery efforts. Of this funding, \$50 million was directed through the MDOT to focus on significant infrastructure repair and adaptation projects. That funding was critical for restoring essential public infrastructure. Additionally, \$10 million was allocated to support our small businesses through the Business Resilience and Recovery Fund.

The sheer amount of damage was more than the state could manage alone. Fortunately, Maine homeowners were able to access over \$4.7 million dollars in Individual Assistance funds from the federal government, which provided vital relief to homeowners, helping them begin the arduous process of recovery and restoration.

These investments were significant and necessary. But responding in this reactive manner to the increasingly severe and common weather events is not sustainable. Moving forward, I want to help empower our state to prepare so that we don't have to repair. And that is why I am here today to proudly introduce LD 1.

In partnership with Gov. Mills and leadership from both sides of the aisle, we are introducing this revenue neutral, bipartisan legislation in direct response to the recommendations from the Maine Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission. This Commission was established last spring following the devastating winter storms to help us understand what we can do as a state to ensure our communities can be more resilient in the face of increasingly severe storms, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events.

As we all know, this past year has been a stark reminder of the challenges posed by extreme weather. In my family, we have always said, "hope for the best, prepare for the worst." It is with this sentiment that we are proposing this proactive approach to emergency planning.

The legislation introduces three key initiatives that will make a meaningful difference in how we prepare for future storms:

1. Home Resiliency Program: This initiative will provide \$15 million in one-time funding to help homeowners invest in improvements to their properties, allowing them to withstand future storms. Grants of up to \$15,000 will be available for targeted interventions, such as reducing roof damage and basement flooding. By empowering homeowners to take action, we can significantly reduce potential losses and insurance costs.

2. Enhanced Hazard Mitigation Resources and Statewide Communications: This part of the proposal acknowledges the challenges faced by the Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) as they respond to an unprecedented number of federal disasters. By investing \$10 million in the State Disaster Recovery Fund and leveraging more federal dollars, establishing and capitalizing a new state fund to match the federal, "Safeguarding Tomorrow through On-going Risk Mitigation Revolving Loan Fund" or STORM fund, and enhancing our emergency communication systems, we can ensure that our communities are better equipped to respond to and recover from disasters.

3. State Resilience Office and Flood-Ready Maine Program: The establishment of a new State Resilience Office within the Maine Office of Community Affairs will support planning efforts to reduce flood and storm damage. This initiative will modernize data on flood risk and improve communication to communities about these risks, enabling them to make informed decisions.

This legislation does not rely on General Funds, which is particularly important during this tight budget cycle. Instead, it leverages federal funding and existing fee-based revenue from the Bureau of Insurance. We are taking a responsible approach to ensuring that Maine people have the resources they need without putting additional strain on our budget. Further, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, every dollar spent on proactive resiliency measures saves communities \$13 in damages, cleanup costs and economic impact. To me, this is a no brainer.

In closing, I urge each of you to consider the importance of this legislation. The storms of the past year have shown us that no community in Maine is immune to their impacts. By passing LD 1, we can work together to make Maine a safer, more resilient place to live. It is our responsibility to prepare for the future and to support our communities, businesses, and homeowners in facing the challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions you may have.