

LD 1: An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes, and Infrastructure

Testimony in Support

February 11, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Committee On Housing and Economic Development. Our names are Linda Nelson and Dan Tishman, we were appointed by Governor Mills to co-chair the Commission on Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience.

We respectfully submit the following testimony in Support of LD 1: An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes, and Infrastructure

Last year the Commission traveled widely throughout Maine to visit communities on the front lines of storm damage and flood vulnerability. We held public listening sessions and met with leaders in the impacted communities of Stonington, Old Orchard Beach, Saco, Rumford, Mexico, Jay, Rockland, Machias, and Caribou. The Commission heard from state and local public officials, police, firefighters and emergency responders, commercial fishermen, business owners, construction experts, residents, and many others about the urgent need to strengthen our state's communities and infrastructure against future extreme storms, storm surge, rising sea levels, inland flooding, and other natural disaster risks.

The Commission heard clearly where improvements are needed. We published an interim report in November that included common-sense recommendations for bridging disaster data and communications gaps among state and local officials; streamlining the permitting to rebuild infrastructure, especially for smaller communities; increasing the supply and availability of construction workers and engineers; and examining how to fund the sheer scale of critical infrastructure resilience needs in Maine, which is beyond the ability of local communities or the state to meet. Our work continues and will culminate in a final report this May.

As co-chairs of the Commission, we have stressed action, urgency, and practicality. The investments proposed in LD 1 respond directly to several of the Commission's interim recommendations and will better prepare Maine for future storms in both the near- and long-term.

In Saco and Mexico, we learned about homes severely impacted by storm surges and rapidly rising rivers. LD 1's Home Resiliency Program aims to assist qualified homeowners in fortifying their properties against the destructive effects of floods and high winds—two of the most common and damaging consequences of storms in Maine.

In Stonington and Rumford, we learned that emergency communications could have been clearer and timelier. In Jay we heard about the challenges of rebuilding damaged infrastructure with tight municipal budgets. LD 1 proposes upgrades to emergency communication equipment and procedures, as well as investments in the state's Disaster Recovery Fund that helps towns meet the match requirements for federal funding.

And in Machias and Caribou, we heard about outdated flood maps that are more than 40 years old and the difficulty of managing flood risk with limited municipal staff. LD 1 would provide funding for

improving access to flood data and maps, and would build regional capacity to assist communities in protecting lives and properties in flood-prone areas.

LD 1 is an important step in applying the lessons from last year's storms and floods. The proposed actions and investments respond directly to experiences of the people, business owners, and first responders that lived through the storms and floods a year ago and are rebuilding their communities today to be stronger and better prepared for the next storm.

Thank you for your service to this Committee and for the opportunity to share our perspective.