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February 11, 2025

-VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION ONLY-

Joint Committee on Housing and Economic Development
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

RE: Support of LD 1 – An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine’s Communities, Homes, and Infrastructure

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

I write to you today in support of LD 1, *An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine’s Communities, Homes, and Infrastructure*.

The Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission (LCRPC) serves the nineteen (19) municipalities within Lincoln County, Maine, providing regional planning; land use; economic and community development; transportation; broadband planning; and environmental sustainability technical assistance. We have served as added capacity to our municipalities and collaborated with key agencies and stakeholders on community resilience efforts in the midcoast region for decades, with the need becoming more direct in the past three (3) years as a regional coordinator and service provider through the State’s Community Resilience Partnership; serving on the Community Resilience Working Group of the Maine Climate Council’s update of “Maine Won’t Wait” Four-Year Climate Plan; and following the devastating storms of December 2023 and January 2024.

Lincoln County is a mix of inland, coastal, and island communities. The December 2023 storm closed nearly 100 roads in the County due to downed trees and some residents went without power for seven (7) days. A few weeks later in January 2024, the region was impacted by significant flooding and storm surge, causing roads to wash out in Boothbay and Bremen; wharves to collapse into the water in Southport and Bristol; the historic Bell Tower at Pemaquid Point was blown out by a rogue wave; and the sewer districts in Boothbay and Wiscasset experienced threats of overtopping into their treatment tanks.

From February to December of 2024 our staff wrote fifteen (15) grant applications and provided targeted assistance on another thirteen (13) applications for 14 of our municipalities for an

application total of \$5.2 million – all but two (2) of these 28 grant applications were for resilience-related infrastructure projects.

While impactful, last winter's storms are not unique. Maine and Lincoln County have been experiencing stronger, more frequent storm events – flooding, winter storms, wind events, etc. – for the past several years, causing power outages, crop damage, infrastructure impacts, and economic losses for our municipalities and community members. Maine's communities know the infrastructure issues that are being eroded by these natural hazards and have been proactively working to secure funding for planning, engineering, and construction of mitigation and adaptation improvements. These projects are often long, complex, and expensive. Assistance from the State in terms of additional capacity, funding, and technical assistance will be essential if we want to make Maine more resilient to these types of occurrences in the future.

Storm events are not just causing damage to physical infrastructure. In September 2023 we partnered with Maine Sea Grant, Bowdoin College, Blue Sky Planning, and others to bring their Social Resilience Project¹ to Lincoln County. This Project looks at increasing the resilience of those most impacted by storm events in our community – older adults, those experiencing food or housing insecurity, people living on fixed incomes, young children and their families, for example. Our work quickly pivoted following the December and January storms by reaching out to service providers and people directly impacted by these events from the emergency services, conservation, municipal, social services, and business sectors to learn from their experiences and find ways to better coordinate and serve our community before, during, and after future storms. Key takeaways from our interviews, focus groups, workshops, and community dinner highlight the perspectives of community members who experience heightened vulnerability to the impacts of natural hazards. Specifically:

- Power outages are a critical challenge.
- Food insecurity can be exacerbated by extreme storm events.
- Communication gaps can limit the ability to prepare for and recover from storms.
- Community members face challenges accessing support resources.
- Extreme storms impact physical and mental health and safety.
- Economic and educational disruptions have short and long-term impacts.
- Physical infrastructure damage requires long-term economic recovery.
- Isolation of community members heightens vulnerabilities.
- Community support networks and cross-sector collaborations are essential.

As a Commission member on the State's Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission, I can attest that the Commission has spent months identifying ways to improve the State's infrastructure – both physical and social – to be better equipped to withstand future storms and

¹ <https://seagrant.umaine.edu/focus-areas/communities-and-economies/the-social-resilience-project/>

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natural hazard impacts. Recommendations made in the Commission's Interim Report, released in November, are thoughtful, impactful, and most importantly, implementable.

LD 1, *An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes, and Infrastructure* proposes implementing the first actionable items from the Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission's Interim Report by:

- Creating new initiatives to improve emergency planning,
- Preparing communities and infrastructure for severe weather,
- Reducing long-term storm-related risks and costs, and
- Seeking federal funds and existing fee-based funding to implement natural hazard planning projects.

I encourage you to support LD 1 so the hazard mitigation and adaptation work our communities have been doing for years can be better supported by the State of Maine and so Maine's people can be more resilient to future storm events.

Sincerely,



Emily Rabbe
Executive Director

Emily Rabbe
Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission
LD 1

I previously submitted written testimony when the hearing was scheduled for February 11, 2025. I'm resubmitting my testimony just in case you need it.