

Testimony in Support of LD 1918

An Act to Modernize Maine's Business Incentive Programs by Creating the Dirigo Business Incentives Program and Eliminating Certain Other Tax Incentive Programs

May 19, 2023

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Susan Swanton. I'm a resident of Biddeford, the retired Executive Director of the Maine Marine Trades Association (MMTA) and proud to serve as Chair of the Board of Trustees of The Landing School of Boatbuilding and Design in Arundel.

I am pleased to see that Gov, Mills has put forth this bill that will help many of Maine's businesses and workers. My forty years in the boating industry showed me just how important a skilled workforce is to the success of our businesses and, by extension, our State. The early part of my career was spent working in boatyards, as well as retail and wholesale businesses. In every circumstance the biggest problem I faced was the lack of a skilled workforce. In fact, it played a large part in my decision to leave that part of the industry and accept the position of Executive Director at MMTA. The Association frequently offered training to its members, and from my own personal experience I was well aware how much it was needed.

Our industry has been so fortunate to have The Landing School where students can come for a school year and earn a diploma in Wooden Boatbuilding, Yacht Design, Marine Systems or Composite Boatbuilding. A second year at the School graduates students with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Marine Industry Technology. In the fall we will be welcoming our first class of students to our recently launched Boatyard Management Program. Our graduates are highly sought after, tend to be well respected and generously compensated. They advance in their careers quickly and indeed many of them have become the leaders of well known boatbuilding companies, owners of businesses of their own and even instructors at our School.

Good education comes at a cost and yet I have seen time and again, in this industry, employers of every size spending hard earned dollars to train their workers. They pay for courses, travel expenses (including meals and lodging), pay wages during the training and bear the burden of lost production time while an employee is attending a class. Some have even provided full scholarships for employees to attend The Landing School. The tax credits that will be available to eligible employers when this bill is enacted into law will help them meet their company's goals, generally lead to increased earning power for their employers and will keep Maine at the forefront of an industry that has been active here for more than 400 years.

On Saturday morning The Landing School Class of 2023 will gather to receive their diplomas and degrees at our 44th graduation ceremony. How I wish you could be there to see the pride and

sense of accomplishment on their faces, to see the work they have completed whether it's their final yacht design project or the boats they have built or those they have repaired. Their stories of how much this education has meant to them, to hear a parent say that their child's time here has changed them in ways they didn't think possible and knowing that most of them have already found employment and will soon be embarking on amazing and rewarding careers would prove how important programs like the Dirigo Business Incentives Programs are to so many people and to the State of Maine.

I thank President Jackson and all the co-sponsors for bringing the Governor's bill forward and I hope that as members of the IDEA Committee each of you will support the bill with your vote of ought to pass.