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Sirs/Madam,

I write to you as chairs and members of the Committee, with reference to *LD 2164 An Act to Establish the Maine-Ireland Trade Commission and Improve Collaboration with Ireland*, presented by Senator STEWART of Aroostook, co-sponsored by Representative Terry of Gorham.

I am fundamentally in support of the bill with the provision of additional nuance with regard to the special circumstances of Northern Ireland. I write to assist and augment your considerations of the merits and potential of the bill when seen in an all-Ireland context. There will shortly be an introduction of transatlantic flights with preclearance from Belfast in addition that already established in Dublin . Consequently, it seems both opportune and timely for the Bill and the State to recognise the unique contributions and opportunities that can be addressed by ensuring that Northern Ireland is a key component of your work.

I draw your attention to this week's seismic political movements with the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the outworkings of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement that ensures commitment by elected representatives to recognising the diversity of its citizens' ethno-national allegiances, and to the cross border and regional institutions and governments in both London and Dublin that assist in honouring these different expressions of a Northern Irish identity.

The 300 years of shared heritage and cultural interconnectedness between Northern Ireland and Maine is not limited to the namesake of towns from my particular region of the island of Ireland, nor a curriculum-based acknowledgement of the migration from Rathlin to Lubeck. We have a great deal in common with Maine. Many of us here have worked hard to ensure there is neither a hard border between the two islands of Britain and Ireland nor across the island of Ireland. Yet still, here in Northern Ireland, we recognise ourselves as a place apart. We have unique experiences and opportunities that separate us from others on these two islands but provide a unique contribution to the Irish American narrative from a Scots-Irish perspective. Our unique politics and governance in this Northern jurisdiction of the island of Ireland separates us from our 'family' in both the Republic and in other parts of the United Kingdom. And whereas that part of a Northern Irish heritage has been undervalued and even written out in some States, I respectfully and humbly ask you to not diminishes the rich complex and multi-dimensional warp and weft of our Northern Irish history.

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Existing exchange and programmes from Institutes of Higher and further Education evidence there is already much to continue growing with Maine. These, along with the our shared agricultural and maritime heritage bring further opportunities for innovative development and economic advancement for our business communities, not least in the areas of film and tourism.

I write in a personal capacity, with the Atlantic within view from my home between Bangor and Belfast in Northern Ireland and with the experience of several decades of service in a professional and voluntary capacity recognised publically for work to build community relations within a post conflict context. If I can be of further assistance, I would be pleased to support your work.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Katy Radford, MBE