

February 13, 2024

Support for L.D. 2191: An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe Weather-related Events

Dear Sen. Curry, Rep. Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business.

I am writing on behalf of the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA), an industry-driven nonprofit working to restore the fisheries in the Gulf of Maine and sustain Maine's fishing communities for future generations. MCFA was founded by commercial fishermen and our work continues to be driven by fishermen today. To that end, MCFA enthusiastically supports the proposed legislation, and commend the Legislature's foresight in recognizing the urgent need for assistance to small businesses grappling with the aftermath of recent severe weather-related events.

Most of Maine's fishing businesses are small enterprises, playing an indispensable role in the dynamic economic fabric of our state. Situated along our picturesque coastlines, the working waterfronts and the small businesses that depend on them have directly experienced the profound consequences of severe weather. Arguably, working waterfronts have endured the most significant repercussions within our state after the January storms.

We believe that the Small Business Weather Emergency Relief Program outlined in the proposed legislation will provide much-needed support to commercial fishing and working waterfront small business owners who have been adversely affected by these weather-related emergencies.

Funding is and will continue to be difficult for working waterfronts because most of this infrastructure lies on private property, while much of the funding and resources that may become available are designated for public infrastructure and properties. This is a perpetuating challenge in our industry as we seek ways to preserve and expand the working waterfront infrastructure necessary to conduct commercial fishing businesses.

This bill will be especially beneficial to Maine's lobstermen. The lobster industry in Maine is owner-operator, meaning that the individual behind the wheel of the boat owns both the boat and permit necessary to fish in Maine waters. In other words, each Maine lobster boat and the captain that runs it is a Maine small business.

As stakeholders in the commercial fishing industry, we understand the importance of a thriving small business sector, and we firmly believe that the proposed legislation will contribute significantly to the revival and sustainability of our local economies. We urge you to support this bill and work towards its prompt enactment, ensuring that relief reaches the businesses that need it most.

Monique Coombs

Monique Coombs
Director of Community Programs

