



## Testimony of Island Institute in Support of LD 1731

April 29, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and Members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Nick Battista, and I am testifying on behalf of Island Institute in support of the intent behind LD 1731.

Island Institute is a 42-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We boldly navigate climate and economic change with island and coastal communities to expand opportunities and deliver solutions. Much of our work takes place in the communities that are highly dependent on fishing, and the bulk of these communities are east of Damariscotta. The economy of these communities is closely tied to fishing and aquaculture, and these industries rely heavily on working waterfront infrastructure.

The Maine State Ferry Service serves 6 of Maine's 15 island year-round island communities. Recognizing the importance of the Maine State Ferry Service to Maine's island communities, between 2021 and 2023, Island Institute engaged KPFF, a nationally recognized transportation consulting firm with deep experience on ferry related issues to develop a series of reports and materials on the Maine State Ferry Service. This included the first demand driven study of the ferry service, as well as a deep dive into various operational issues. We worked closely with both Maine DOT/Maine State Ferry Service and a group of island community advisors who are very knowledgeable about how ferry related matters impact their community and who have spent years working to improve ferry service for their communities.

Here is a summary of existing transportation needs - <https://www.islandinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Summary-of-Transportation-Needs-by-Island.pdf> Additionally, through this process, KPFF also provided a set of Ferry Operator Best Practices - [https://www.islandinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Ferry-Operator-Best-Practices-Review\\_DRAFT.pdf](https://www.islandinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Ferry-Operator-Best-Practices-Review_DRAFT.pdf) that includes a look at how other ferry services around the country handle 3 issues, funding and governance models, emergency transport options, and encouraging modal shifts from passenger cars to walk-ons.

Strengthening the role of the existing Maine State Ferry Service advisory board may help address some of the issues that arise between the Maine State Ferry Service and the needs of island communities. This isn't to say the advisory board isn't working well – the advisory board and the MSFS have, in recent years, had a more productive and collaborative working relationship. At the same time, these are complex issues and it is tough to meet the operational needs of the ferry service and also the needs of island communities. A stronger advisory board may be a way to help communities and the MSFS sort through these tough issues.