



**Testimony of the Island Institute In Support of LD 49 – An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Invest in Infrastructure to Address Sea Level Rise
April 26, 2021**

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Nick Battista, and I am testifying in support of LD 49 for the Island Institute.

The Island Institute is a 38-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. The Island Institute's community development work focuses on: the marine economy, climate and energy pilots, small business, education, and leadership. Broadband is foundational to all of this work, and all Mainers need to have the ability to use high-speed, reliable internet.

Sea level rise presents a long term, systemic risk to Maine's coastal communities. According to the Maine Climate Council's Cost of Doing Nothing Report - <https://www.maine.gov/future/initiatives/climate/climate-council/reports> using an intermediate global emissions scenario, there is a 67% probability that sea level will rise between 3 and 4.6 feet by the year 2100. With this rate of sea level rise, not accounting for increased intensity and frequency of storms, Maine would see a 10-fold increase in coastal flooding by 2050. With 1.5 feet of sea level rise by 2050, we can expect \$17.5 billion in coastal damage and 21,000 coastal jobs lost (see page 35- ERG Volume 2). With 1.6 feet of sea level rise on top of the highest annual tide, 26 miles of public roads (not including privately maintained roads) and 7 miles of railroad are at risk (see page 39- ERG Volume 2)

The Maine Climate Council's Scientific and Technical subcommittee was clear. The sea is rising, and we need to start preparing now for a future where high tides and storm surge appear in places that currently don't see saltwater. **The STS recommended that the Climate Council consider committing to manage for 1.5 feet of relative sea level rise by 2050, and 3.9 feet of sea level rise by the year 2100, but preparing to manage for 3.0 feet by 2050, and 8.8 feet by 2100.**

Seventy-five percent of Maine's coastal communities have fewer than 3,500 people, and 25 percent of coastal communities have fewer than 800 people. Further, as the [Maine Won't Wait](#) climate action plan from the Maine Climate Council notes, only 11 percent of Maine communities have a town planner on staff, and 72 percent have no local planner and insufficient or no regional planning support.

Small rural towns along Maine's coast are exceptionally vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise due to their limited planning capacity combined with a heavy economic and social reliance on the marine economy's working waterfront infrastructure. Small towns have

limited financial capacity to allocate funds to and implement infrastructure projects that would protect their residents from the impacts of climate change.

The Island Institute supports communities as they grapple with understanding the potential economic, social, and infrastructure impacts and costs of sea level rise and provides them with information and finance-planning activities. To learn more about what communities are already doing, steps communities can take if they are interested, and to view a video from O'Chang studios, please visit <https://www.islandinstitute.org/priorities/building-resilient-communities/sea-level-rise/>

Additionally, the Island Institute also recently released a video about sea level rise as part of our Climate of Change Video Series. This video highlights Vinalhaven's work as a community to understand sea level rise. This video is available here - <https://www.islandinstitute.org/stories/a-climate-of-change-film-series/>

We have provided over \$114,000 in technical planning support to communities including Biddeford, Damariscotta, Waldoboro, Monhegan, South Thomaston, Vinalhaven, Brooksville, Milbridge, and Machiasport through our Shore Up Technical Assistance Fund.

Undertaking infrastructure upgrades will be far more costly and while LD 49's \$50,000,000 is a substantial sum, it is only a down payment on the projected cost of adapting coastal infrastructure that to withstand the expected rise in sea levels.

Communities already make regular investments in their infrastructure. Using these additional State funds to help offset the cost of incorporating a certain amount of sea level rise into a project plan would help stretch these funds in ways that directly help communities adapt to sea level rise.

Additionally, much of the economically important working waterfront infrastructure is privately owned and may not be eligible if funding is limited to municipal infrastructure. It may be helpful for this Committee to expand eligibility and to provide additional clarity on how these funds are intended to be used.

Building community resilience to climate change is critical, and this bond plays an important role. However, in terms of helping communities adapt to sea level rise or otherwise increase their resilience to upcoming changes in the climate, **access to broadband is the single most important investment** the state should be contemplating. The presence of high-speed internet in a community doesn't guarantee a bright economic future, but not having high speed internet adds a significant burden to the community and decreases the community's overall resilience to various changes.

The Island Institute supports moving LD 49 forward, so long as the State is also committing significant funding to address rural broadband.