



132nd MAINE LEGISLATURE

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Legislative Document

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S.P. 903

In Senate, February 24, 2026

An Act to Establish the Maine Blue Economy Center

Reported by Senator CURRY of Waldo for the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development pursuant to Resolve 2025, chapter 114, section 7.

Reference to the Committee on Housing and Economic Development suggested and ordered printed pursuant to Joint Rule 218.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D M Grant'.

DAREK M. GRANT
Secretary of the Senate

1 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

2 **Sec. 1. 5 MRSA c. 397** is enacted to read:

3 **CHAPTER 397**

4 **MAINE BLUE ECONOMY CENTER**

5 **§13401. Definitions**

6 As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms
7 have the following meanings.

8 **1. Blue economy sector.** "Blue economy sector" means the aggregate of persons
9 engaged in any economic activity relating to aquaculture and marine vegetation, marine
10 biotechnology, ocean data and marine research, resilient coastal infrastructure, sustainable
11 boat building or marine propulsion for the purpose of improving human, animal and
12 environmental health, including business, manufacturing, research, education and other
13 activities.

14 **2. Board.** "Board" means the Board of Directors of the Maine Blue Economy Center
15 established in section 13403, subsection 2.

16 **3. Bond.** "Bond" means a bond or note or other evidence of indebtedness authorized
17 under this chapter, whether issued under or pursuant to a bond resolution, trust indenture,
18 loan or other security agreement.

19 **4. Center.** "Center" means the Maine Blue Economy Center established in section
20 13402.

21 **5. Certified blue economy business.** "Certified blue economy business" means a
22 business that has been certified by the board as being eligible to receive investments, grants,
23 loans and incentives from the fund.

24 **6. Fund.** "Fund" means the Maine Blue Economy Fund established in section 13404.

25 **7. Real and personal property.** "Real and personal property" means properties and
26 assets purchased by the center or transferred to the center from federal, state, local and
27 private entities and individuals.

28 **§13402. Maine Blue Economy Center established**

29 The Maine Blue Economy Center is established as a body corporate and politic and a
30 public instrumentality of the State, exercising public and essential governmental functions.
31 The center is an independent legal entity and is not a department, agency or instrumentality
32 of State Government for purposes of administrative law or budgeting, and the debts,
33 liabilities and obligations of the center are not debts, liabilities or obligations of the State.
34 The center shall leverage and expand the State's blue economy sector by:

35 **1. Central entity.** Serving as the central entity and coordinating organization for blue
36 economy sector initiatives on behalf of the State and working in collaboration with
37 governmental entities, trade associations, institutions of higher education, research
38 institutions and other entities to provide for the growth of the blue economy sector;

1 **2. Data collection and publication.** Gathering and analyzing data that inform
2 decisions, measure progress and identify new opportunities for the blue economy sector.
3 The center shall publish the data through accessible tools, such as an online portal;

4 **3. Revenue to center.** Applying for and accepting contributions of any source of
5 money, property, labor or any other things of value, including federal, state and nonprofit
6 funding opportunities for the State's blue economy sector;

7 **4. Workforce retention and attraction.** Facilitating the creation of a highly skilled
8 workforce and attracting and retaining workers in the blue economy sector. The center
9 shall promote and assist in the placement of internships, apprenticeships and
10 interdisciplinary trainings at certified blue economy businesses in the State;

11 **5. Business development and attraction.** Coordinating the State's business
12 development and business attraction programs and organizations to increase the number of
13 certified blue economy businesses in the State;

14 **6. Targeted workforce analyses.** Conducting targeted workforce analyses by
15 assessing workforce barriers and future needs in the State's blue economy sector;

16 **7. Planning for growth.** Creating and executing a strategic plan for growth in the
17 State's blue economy sector;

18 **8. Education and training.** Enhancing science, technology, engineering and
19 mathematics education and engagement in kindergarten to grade 12 and higher education
20 curricula;

21 **9. Research and development.** Facilitating increased research and development
22 activity relating to the blue economy sector at the State's public and private research
23 organizations;

24 **10. Public engagement.** Facilitating community outreach and educational
25 programming for the people of the State related to the blue economy sector;

26 **11. Marketing and promotion.** Marketing the State's blue economy sector both
27 within and outside of the State to attract companies, business investment and talent to the
28 State; and

29 **12. Administering fund.** Administering the fund.

30 **§13403. Maine Blue Economy Center; powers; board; obligations**

31 **1. Powers.** The center may:

32 **A.** Sue and be sued;

33 **B.** Adopt bylaws or rules consistent with this chapter for the governance of the center's
34 affairs;

35 **C.** Exercise all of the general powers of corporations under Title 13-C, section 302;

36 **D.** Contract with the Federal Government or its instrumentalities or agencies, the State
37 or its agencies, instrumentalities or municipalities, public bodies, private corporations,
38 partnerships, associations and individuals to carry out the purposes of this chapter;

39 **E.** Borrow money and apply for and accept advances, loans, grants, contributions and
40 other forms of financial assistance from the Federal Government, the State, a
41 municipality or other public body or other sources, public or private, for the purposes

1 of this chapter and give any security that is required and enter into and carry out
2 contracts in connection with any financial assistance;

3 F. Borrow money and make, issue and sell at public or private sale negotiable notes,
4 bonds and other evidences of indebtedness or obligation of the center for the purposes
5 of this chapter and secure the payment of that indebtedness or obligation or any part of
6 that indebtedness or obligation by pledge of all or any part of the operating revenues
7 of the center;

8 G. Enter into loan or security agreements with one or more lending institutions,
9 including, but not limited to, banks, insurance companies and institutions that
10 administer pension funds, or with trustees of those institutions, for the issuance of
11 bonds and exercise with respect to those loan or security agreements all of the powers
12 delineated in this chapter for the issuance of bonds;

13 H. Provide from the operating revenues of the center for the maintenance, construction
14 or reconstruction of facilities to carry out the purposes of the center;

15 I. Adopt rules for the administration of this chapter. Rules adopted pursuant to this
16 paragraph are routine technical rules pursuant to chapter 375, subchapter 2-A; and

17 J. Take all other lawful action necessary and incidental to the powers under this
18 subsection.

19 **2. Board.** The Board of Directors of the Maine Blue Economy Center is established
20 and consists of 15 directors, of whom 4 directors are ex officio members as specified in
21 paragraph B and 11 directors are appointed as specified in paragraph C. Each director is
22 entitled to one vote.

23 A. The board has the full authority to direct the affairs and activities of the center.

- 24 B. Ex officio members of the board are:
- 25 (1) The Commissioner of Economic and Community Development or the
 - 26 commissioner's designee;
 - 27 (2) The president of the Maine Technology Institute under section 15302 or the
 - 28 president's designee;
 - 29 (3) The Chancellor of the University of Maine System or the chancellor's designee;
 - 30 and
 - 31 (4) The President of the Maine Community College System or the president's
 - 32 designee.

33 C. The members of the board who are not ex officio members are appointed by the
34 Governor and subject to confirmation by the Senate and must be individuals or
35 representatives of organizations that are in a position to advance the purposes and goals
36 of the center and are able to have a significant effect on improving the State's blue
37 economy sector as specified in the bylaws of the center. When making appointments
38 under this paragraph, the Governor shall consider the unique multidisciplinary nature
39 of the State's blue economy sector and shall consult with the Board of Directors of the
40 Maine Technology Institute and the board of directors of the Finance Authority of
41 Maine to ensure the alignment of those appointments with the State's economic
42 development strategies. Membership under this paragraph must include:

- 1 (1) A representative of a business in the State with fewer than 25 employees that
2 is involved in the blue economy sector;
- 3 (2) A representative of a business in the State with 25 or more employees that is
4 involved in the blue economy sector;
- 5 (3) Two representatives of nonprofit research institutions based in the State that
6 are involved in research and development in the blue economy sector;
- 7 (4) A representative of a private college, university, community college or trade
8 school in the State that is involved in the blue economy sector;
- 9 (5) A representative recommended by the chief of a federally recognized Indian
10 tribe, nation or band located in the State;
- 11 (6) Two representatives, one of whom must be an entrepreneur, of trade
12 associations based in the State or other nonprofit organizations that support the
13 blue economy sector, including the executive director of an association of certified
14 blue economy businesses, professionals and researchers in the State;
- 15 (7) A representative of business investors or the banking or finance sectors;
- 16 (8) A representative from Washington County; and
- 17 (9) A representative from Aroostook County.

18 Members of the board who are not ex officio members serve 3-year terms.

19 D. The board shall elect a chair and vice-chair from among its members. The center
20 may employ an executive director, technical experts and other agents and employees,
21 permanent and temporary, as required and may determine their qualifications, duties
22 and compensation. For required legal services, the center may employ or retain its own
23 counsel and legal staff.

24 E. For transacting business at board meetings, a majority of directors then in office
25 constitutes a quorum. The vote of a majority of the directors present at board meetings
26 constitutes an act of the board.

27 **3. Liability.** The liability of the center is governed by the Maine Tort Claims Act. A
28 member of the board or an employee of the center is not subject to any personal liability
29 for having acted in the service of the member's or employee's duty as a member of the board
30 or an employee of the center within the course and scope of membership or employment to
31 carry out a power or duty under this chapter. The center shall indemnify a member of the
32 board or an employee of the center against expenses actually and necessarily incurred in
33 connection with the defense of an action or proceeding in which a member of the board or
34 an employee of the center is made a party by reason of past or present association with the
35 center.

36 **4. Expenses.** A member of the board is not entitled to receive compensation for
37 services to the center but is entitled to receive reimbursement for necessary expenditures,
38 including travel expenses incurred in carrying out those services.

39 **§13404. Maine Blue Economy Fund**

40 **1. Maine Blue Economy Fund established.** There is established a nonlapsing fund
41 to be known as the Maine Blue Economy Fund for the purpose of receiving funds from the
42 State and gifts, grants, devises, bequests, trusts or security documents to support the

1 operations and initiatives of the center. The State shall credit to the fund any appropriation
2 or allocation made to the center in the fiscal year in which the appropriation or allocation
3 is made.

4 A. The fund must be used to:

5 (1) Make qualified investments, grants and loans and provide incentives to eligible
6 recipients to advance the blue economy sector in the State;

7 (2) Provide business supports for new or expanding businesses;

8 (3) Purchase, lease, acquire, own, improve, use, sell, convey, transfer or otherwise
9 deal in and with a center property, a center project or any interest in a center
10 property or center project, whether tangible or intangible, as otherwise authorized
11 under this chapter;

12 (4) Pay the costs of operating, maintaining, improving and repairing all property
13 and projects of the center;

14 (5) Pay the costs of administering and operating the center, including, but not
15 limited to, all wages, salaries, benefits and other expenses authorized by the board
16 or the executive director;

17 (6) Pay the principal and premium, if any, and the interest on the outstanding bonds
18 of the center related to a center property or center project as they become due and
19 payable;

20 (7) Create and maintain reserves required or provided for in any law authorizing
21 or any security document securing the bonds of the center related to a center
22 property or center project;

23 (8) Create and maintain a capital improvement fund for a center property or center
24 project established by the board;

25 (9) Make payments in lieu of taxes and pay service fees as determined appropriate
26 by the board; and

27 (10) Pay all expenses incident to the management and operation of the center.

28 B. Any amount remaining in the fund at the close of any fiscal year is carried over and
29 credited to the fund for the succeeding year.

30 C. Money in the fund must be paid to the center on manifests approved by the Governor
31 and Legislature in the same manner as other state claims are paid.

32 D. The revenues received by and due to the center from all sources other than state
33 appropriation must be retained by the center and must be used in such a manner as the
34 board determines consistent with the provisions of this section or as otherwise provided
35 by law or by the terms and conditions of any gift, grant, devise, bequest, trust or
36 security document.

37 **2. Eligible recipients.** Certified blue economy businesses, research institutions and
38 educational institutions are eligible to receive funding from the center upon a majority vote
39 of the board. The board may use a competitive process to award funds.

40 **§13405. Interest of public officials, directors or employees**

1 **1. Acquisition of interest.** A public official, member of the board or employee of the
2 center may not acquire or hold a direct or an indirect financial or personal interest in:

3 A. A center activity;

4 B. Center property; or

5 C. A contract or proposed contract in connection with a center activity.

6 **2. Present or past interest in property.** If a public official, member of the board or
7 employee of the center owns or controls, or owned or controlled within the preceding 2
8 years, a direct or an indirect interest in property known to be included or planned to be
9 included in a center activity, that public official, member or employee shall disclose this
10 fact immediately in writing to the board and the disclosure must be entered in the board's
11 minutes.

12 **3. Recusal.** A public official, member of the board or employee of the center with an
13 interest in property under this section may not participate in an action by the center
14 affecting that property.

15 **4. Institutional affiliations, disclosure and recusal.** Notwithstanding subsection 1,
16 an educational institution, research institution or nonprofit organization represented on the
17 board may apply for and receive funding or support from the center if:

18 A. The board member affiliated with the applicant institution or organization discloses
19 the affiliation in writing to the board prior to any deliberation, decision or vote
20 regarding the application;

21 B. The affiliated board member recuses that member from any participation in the
22 discussion, deliberation and decision on the matter; and

23 C. Action on the application is taken by a vote of a majority of the disinterested board
24 members present and voting.

25 **5. Violation.** A violation of this section is a Class E crime.

26 **§13406. Exemption from execution**

27 **1. Property exempt from execution.** The real and personal property, including funds,
28 of the center is exempt from levy and sale by virtue of an execution. An execution or other
29 judicial process may not be issued against the center's real and personal property, and a
30 judgment against the center may not be a charge or lien upon its real and personal property.

31 **2. Construction; limitation of application.** This section does not:

32 A. Prohibit the center from making payments in lieu of taxes to a municipality; or

33 B. Apply to or limit the right of an obligee to foreclose or otherwise enforce a mortgage
34 of the center or to pursue remedies for the enforcement of a pledge or lien given by the
35 center on its rents, fees, grants, revenues or other sources pledged by the center to the
36 payment of its bonds.

37 **§13407. Termination of center**

38 The center is not dissolved until:

39 **1. Legislature provides for termination.** The center is terminated by the Legislature;
40 and

1 **2. Payment of bonds, premium and interest.** The center's bonds and any premium
2 and interest have been paid or a sufficient amount for the payment of the bonds and any
3 premium and interest to maturity or a prior redemption date have been irrevocably set aside
4 in trust for the benefit of the bondholders.

5 **§13408. Annual report; legislation**

6 **1. Annual financial report.** The center shall submit annually to the Governor, the
7 Executive Director of the Legislative Council and the joint standing committee of the
8 Legislature having jurisdiction over economic development matters, no later than 120 days
9 after the close of the center's fiscal year, a complete report on the activities of the center.
10 The report may also be provided to any other member of the Legislature and to any other
11 person. The report must include all of the following for that fiscal year:

12 A. A description of the center's operations;

13 B. The center's current strategic plan for growth in the blue economy sector pursuant
14 to section 13402, subsection 7 and progress toward meeting the goals of the plan;

15 C. An accounting of the center's receipts and expenditures, assets and liabilities at the
16 end of the fiscal year;

17 D. A listing of all investments, grants, loans and incentives provided by the center
18 during the fiscal year;

19 E. A listing of all property transactions conducted during the fiscal year;

20 F. A listing of any bonds issued during the fiscal year;

21 G. A statement of the center's proposed and projected activities for the ensuing fiscal
22 year; and

23 H. Recommendations regarding further actions that may be suitable for achieving the
24 purposes of this chapter.

25 **2. Legislation.** After reviewing the report under subsection 1, the joint standing
26 committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over economic development matters may
27 report out legislation relating to the report.

28 **Sec. 2. Maine Blue Economy Center; interim report.** The Maine Blue
29 Economy Center established pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5, section 13402,
30 referred to in this section as "the center," shall submit an interim report to the joint standing
31 committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over economic development matters no
32 later than 180 days after all members of its board of directors have been appointed. The
33 interim report must include, but is not limited to, the following:

34 1. A description of the center's operations;

35 2. A statement of the center's proposed and projected activities for the ensuing fiscal
36 year; and

37 3. Recommendations regarding further actions that may be suitable for achieving the
38 purposes of Title 5, chapter 397.

39 After reviewing the report under this section, the joint standing committee may report
40 out legislation relating to the report in the same legislative session in which the report is
41 received.

