The Hospitality, Tourism and Retail Sub-committee raises up two urgent recommendations to share immediately with the governor and her staff, as well as a quick-start recommendation that has an easy technical fix.

The first recommendation is about salvaging as much as possible the 2020 summer tourist season in Maine. Our state’s requirements on out-of-state visitors are more restrictive than those of our peers in the Northeast. New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts do not have the mandatory 14-day quarantine or testing requirement that Maine imposes. Strong anecdotal evidence (data should be available shortly) shows that a significant portion of the tourists who otherwise would have visited Maine this summer are traveling to these other states instead, because of the different entry requirements.

This sub-committee recommends that state officials work with extreme urgency and in collaboration with the industry to find solutions that align our policies more closely with our peers in the Northeast. We recognize that this recommendations strays into the public health decisions that are technically outside of the scope the Maine Economic Recovery Committee. However, we feel compelled to make this recommendation because the economic consequences are so massive for these sectors and Mainers more generally. To illustrate the stakes, a 50% drop in the 22 million tourists (CHECK) who visited Maine last summer represents a $2 billion hit to the Maine economy, with the families and businesses who make a living in the hospitality, tourism and retail sectors hardest hit. We are unaware of a similar economic catastrophe that the state has experienced in recent history.

The second recommendation is for immediate efforts to design and implement a support mechanism specifically for businesses in these three sectors, including all the related businesses such as music and cultural attractions, motor coaches and transportation, the weddings and events industry, museums and more. The size of this support will depend on the scale of the decline in this summer season. Other states are ahead of Maine in standing up these type of support mechanisms, and we can learn from their efforts. To the extent Maine’s summer season is worse than these other states, the scale of the support will be proportionally greater as well. This sub-committee will be working to provide additional thoughts and guidance around this idea in the coming weeks. However, we believe it is essential to start planning for this support so that it can help offer a lifeline soon to otherwise viable businesses, particularly as current federal stimulus and unemployment support expire mid-summer.

Finally, the committee is advancing a third recommendation to that unspent funds for this fiscal year from the Maine Office of Tourism not be swept in the general fund.