

Timothy Rich
Bar Harbor, ME
LD 201

To The Committee Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, 131st Legislature Committee, for the State of Maine.

My name is Timothy Rich. I am the owner and operator of The Independent Cafe & Market in Bar Harbor. I have served in this role for 12 years and previous to that worked in the hospitality industry in Maine on and for more than a decade. I also own several commercial properties in Midcoast Maine.

I also serve as the First Vice Chair of Hospitality Maine and am the incoming Chair of the organization later this year. In this role I speak frequently with many of the over 700 members of our organization all over our state. As many of you know Hospitality Maine is the largest trade group of hotels, restaurants, and affiliated members in our state. I'm sure we all agree that Maine is known is an incredibly welcoming state to travelers, vacationers, and tourists and our industry provides them with incredible lodging and food and our industry is a huge driver of the tourism industry in Maine. This trickles down throughout our entire state to benefit (for example) everyone from farmers to locally owned specialty food makers and support our local economies by creating good, well paying jobs for people from Fort Kent to Kittery. Our organization also has a non-profit arm that does tremendous good in Maine by pursuing many public service projects all across the state, including pairing former inmates leaving jails and prisons with good paying jobs in the hospitality industry that give them a leg up in life and an opportunity and the support to choose a new, better path for themselves and their families.

I'm saying all of this because I want you all to understand how important our industry is and how close our industry came to collapsing three years ago when COVID appeared and tourism looked like it was coming to a crashing halt in June of 2020.

In the end the work you all and our federal government did, along with the flexibility and innovation of entrepreneurs all across our state helped prevent this catastrophe for most of us. Instead of failure it gave many of us the opportunity to take a close look at how we did business and how we could do it better. And one of the innovations that came out of that period was the sale of alcohol to go for bars and restaurants across our state.

I have spoken with dozens of restaurant owners, servers, and customers about this bill and I can tell you every person is in support of this. This benefits everyone from the larger businesses that employ hundreds of people to the small Mom and Pop shops with just one or two employees. Tourists, locals, and servers all love having this option. The state was careful to include safe guards to make sure this option wasn't abused and it hasn't been. What it has done is helped support the hardworking entrepreneurs that are the backbone of the Maine economy and helped Maine further grow our reputation as a place that is hospitable and welcoming to those from all over the world. This option is considered by many to be far more enlightened than the previous laws and in every person in our state have been very respectful and careful not to abuse it. This is a good law that helps all of us and I strongly encourage all of you to act on this, make it permanent, and tell all of us hardworking industry professionals that you hear us, you believe in us, and you will support us like we have supported out.

I regret that I can't be there in person today, but thank you all for taking the time to hear or read this testimony and I sincerely thank you for all of your hard work on behalf of the state we all love.

Timothy Rich