

Ben Conniff
Portland
LD 199

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. I am writing in support of LD 199.

I'm a co-founder of Luke's Lobster. We're a vertically integrated seafood company that buys directly from fishermen, runs our own production facility, and operates a group of restaurants in Maine and around the country, as well as a branded grocery business and online seafood market. We process about 5 million pounds of lobster per year, and between our different businesses we employ 250 Mainers.

Even before the pandemic, it was incredibly challenging to find workers for open positions in our production facility and our restaurant. Since 2020, finding workers has become even harder as barriers to employment such as lack of affordable housing, affordable child care, and transportation have only grown.

We are an enthusiastic employer and advocate for Maine's immigrant community. Our business would be much more successful and able to grow faster and better support Maine's seafood industry if more members of the immigrant community were fully embraced as part of our broader Maine community, and had the stability and security to make long term commitments to our state and its local employers.

Luke's Lobster offers its employees health and retirement benefits. We do so because it's the right thing to do for the folks who contribute to our success, and also because it makes them more engaged, prouder to work for us, and more committed to us in the long term.

We recognize that not all businesses have the resources to provide these benefits to their employees, and that there are some people who are temporarily out of the workforce due to delays in their status, or to life events that sideline them for a time, and therefore cannot get employer-sponsored health benefits. These are all people who deserve the safety and dignity of affordable healthcare, and also people who could be major contributors now or in the future to our economy if we provide them the resources they need to live a healthy life in our state. If we choose not to, we risk losing valuable workers and contributors to our community at a time when we all recognize our working population is shrinking, and too low to support the business we currently have in Maine.

Whenever someone tells me they are thinking of starting a business in Maine, I have to caution them that they need to be wary of how difficult it is to find employees. We can change that narrative by making Maine a more welcoming, equitable, and healthy place for all who come here. I urge you to pass this bill for the benefit of those who need the benefits, and for the benefit of our businesses and our overall community.

Sincerely,

Ben Conniff
Co-Founder and Chief Innovation Officer
Luke's Lobster