

My name is Sheri Blackstone, a resident of Harpswell, Maine. I am the owner of Coastal Connections Property Management, based out of Harpswell. I was born and raised along the coast of Maine, and have had the opportunity to also raise my kids here. I have worked extremely hard in forming two local businesses, one of 26 years, the other of 14 years, both of which depend upon Maine tourism.

I am writing to strongly oppose LD 1893, 'An Act to allow a Municipality to Impose a Fee on Short-term Rentals for the Benefit of that Municipality'. We have had an influx of people moving to Maine since COVID-19, which has seemed to complicate the manner in which short-term rentals & vacation rentals are now viewed by town committees as well as at State levels. This is not the fault of any vacation rental business, but it seems our business is now being victimized. It's clear that people from near and far love Maine, and have chosen to purchase properties here, which has unfortunately affected the "affordable housing market", although vacation rentals are being blamed. Many recent home buyers are now able to mostly work in the comfort of their own home, and they chose Maine to be "home". The owners in which I work with, choose to rent out their homes in hopes of purely keeping the home in their family, or have plans to retire here, it is not out of greed, which is what even the pure thought of this bill imposes.

Our travelers should not be punished for choosing to visit Maine with added tax fees. They already endure a 9% State Tax which is charged by us per the rental rate, any cleaning fee, pet fees, etc. The State Tax brings in over One Billion Tax Dollars yearly to our state. On top of the taxes travelers are paying, they are also contributing immensely to our state and municipal economies, as the top three items they spend money on according to MOT (Maine Office of Tourism) is food/beverage, Touring/Sightseeing, and Shopping. Do you have any idea how many small, local businesses they support during their stays, as well as the increase in employment for our hard-working locals due to tourism? Those are only two major impacts from people just loving Maine, and choosing to visit here. If we continue to increase costs for visitors it will most certainly hurt our vibrant industry, as well as the economy of Maine as a whole.

I believe that hotel operators and real estate professionals also understand how important this well over 100-year-old industry is to Maine's economy and the livelihood of thousands who live here. Vacation rentals are in demand, why would you want to hurt one of the major industries which feeds our state? If guests can't find rentals here in Maine, they will go elsewhere, which will be much less revenue in your state hospitality tax, and in turn will most certainly hurt our state economy.

Please exercise caution and vote "ought not to pass". This bill, LD 1893, has no limit to what a municipality can charge, nor is it necessary. This bill would allow each municipality to impose a new uncapped tax on lodging facilities if approved. This unlimited fee will send our travelers to a new place to travel to. I understand that there may be some residents who, for whatever reasons, wish to restrict or harshly limit short-term and vacation rentals. Please think long and hard about this bill, and also consider the injustice of this additional, elevated, and precarious tax to our travelers. Maine is

widely known for its tourism, mountains, and coastline. Let's not ward off our visitors, but welcome them, as we have for years.

Again, I'm writing to highly oppose LD 1893. My opposition is based on the unfairness of singling out any certain sectors of the lodging industry which potentially would subject them to an additional tax, which can be in any amount, in addition to the 9% lodging tax already being charged. Please, use discretion, and vote "ought not pass" --if you weren't born here in Maine, take a minute to remember why you moved here.

Many thanks for your time and consideration--I would at any time be happy to answer any questions that our Legislators or Senate may have.

With Respect,

Sheri Blackstone

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Maine Coastal Connections