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The Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
Testimony from Leo Waterston, Program Director of FocusMaine

In Support Of

L.D. 2212

An Act to Strengthen Maine’s Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure
Investment

28 February 2024

Chairman Ingwersen, Chairman Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Leo Waterston, and I am the Program Director of FocusMaine.

FocusMaine is a statewide economic development organization with a mission to propel the growth of Maine’s most promising industries and transform Maine into a hub for top talent. We create and execute programs with partners to grow jobs and generate revenue for companies in the food economy and bioeconomy. Investing in Maine’s food economy will be key to achieving our goals for Maine, which include 1) scaling small and mid-sized food and beverage companies, 2) strengthening value chains, and 3) strengthening domestic export capacity.

That is why FocusMaine supports L.D. 2212, an act to Strengthen Maine’s Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment to operationalize the advisory board and provide a one-time appropriation of \$10 million in fiscal year 2024-25. Doing so will help to enhance the impact of FocusMaine business and market development programming in partnership with Coastal Enterprises Inc. (CEI), Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA), and Maine Center for Entrepreneurs (MCE) with the intent to build a more durable, diverse, and inclusive food economy. L.D. 2212 also aligns with the state’s 10-year Economic Development Plan, and the Domestic Trade Program through the Department of Economic and Community Development.

The passing of L.D. 2212 would be transformative for Maine’s food economy and its broader economic landscape. The affected producers not only contribute substantial revenue but also generate valuable employment opportunities that resonate with Maine’s cultural heritage. Moreover, this legislation would address a critical gap in the support ecosystem, complementing the efforts of organizations like FocusMaine and our partners. To be competitive in a regional, national, and potentially global marketplace, financial support is required for our valued producers to innovate and grow.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully,

Leo Waterston