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QUALITY YACHT SERVICE

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April 4, 2025

My name is Laura East, I am an eleventh generation Mainer and I work as the Marina Manager of Strouts Point Wharf Company in South Freeport. I am writing today to testify against the proposed bill LD 115.

I have the unique privilege and perspective of running a marina in Coastal Maine with a yachting background. Before taking this job, I studied at Maine Maritime Academy, worked on commercial vessels in Alaska, followed by a career on private yachts cruising globally. I still race competitively and do yacht deliveries when scheduling allows. As a member of this industry, see how the yachting in the State of Maine is on the rise and the benefits to local economies and citizens.

In 2020, more vessels, both large and small, came to the Gulf of Maine than ever before. The benefits of having these vessels in our waters spans farther than the marinas that host them. Our local economies greatly profit from a wide variety of services they use, such as grocery provisions, local farmers markets, flowers, fuel, catering, hotels, restaurants, airports, taxis, contractors and mechanics, retail shops, massage/spa therapists, local fisherman, tourism, and day workers (which are mostly locals). Several years ago, I did the accounting for one of these vessels, I repeatedly processed local grocery store receipts totaling over 10k per month just for this single vessel. This did not include any other services, simply groceries alone. I have seen firsthand how much money these vessels can infuse into our community in one weekend, let alone in an entire season.

In addition to the large economic impact these yachts bring, they also provide an unusual opportunity for Mainers. When these yachts come to Maine it opens a door for careers at seas, elite racing, and world travel, I did not know this was an option when I was younger. I've seen high school students and adults employed by these yachts seasonally and full-time. Recently, I've had the privilege of watching a local high school student work part time on a yacht during its summers in Maine. The Captain of this yacht took this student under his wing in order to teach seamanship, boat handling, engineering, and navigation, which is an opportunity that is rarely afforded in a professional capacity for Maine youth. This student is now finishing his freshman year at Maine Maritime Academy. While this is the story of one individual, it is not an isolated opportunity.

When I first started shipping there were only a few facilities in the state that could accommodate private vessels over 100'. Today, Maine's infrastructure which can berth vessels over 100' continues to grow, new marinas or marina expansions with sufficient power capabilities, fuel and pump out are just part of the infrastructure that Maine facilities are investing in. If LD 115 is passed, these yachts will either 1) shorten their trips to Maine, 2) anchor out, bypassing all dockage fees for the facility or 3) choose another destination all together. I have spoken to several yacht owners who intend to visit Maine waters, they do not want to pay a "slip tax" and have confirmed they will look elsewhere or reduce their time here should this pass. All these options are bad for the community and the State of Maine.



BREWER SOUTH FREEPORT MARINE



STROUTS POINT WHARF COMPANY

HARRASEEKET RIVER | SOUTH FREEPORT, MAINE



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I would encourage you to look at the state of Rhode Island, a world class boating destination with a thriving working waterfront. RI foregoes all boat sales tax and boat property tax, it also levies no tax on boating services. Dockage, retrofits, repairs and mooring fees are not taxed in Rhode Island. This policy has encouraged yacht owners, large and small, to bring their business to RI.

The marine industry in the State of Maine is not for the faint of heart. In a state once known for its shipbuilding and commercial fishing, these coastal communities have had to adapt to constant change in order to survive. In the absence of a once booming ship building or commercial fishing industry, many have found a lost revenue source within the yachting industry. I find it incomprehensible that the State would now add a barrier between its already suffering coastal communities and a profitable revenue source.

I know the creators of this bill have good intentions, but they fail to have a full understanding of the repercussions of LD 115 on coastal communities. I see the diligent work our state leaders do, and I don't believe they would show this much disregard for the hard-working coastal communities of Maine, who have already been hit hard. There has long been a discussion about taxing the rich; however, this is not the right approach to address that issue or to fairly fund Maine's transportation challenges, especially land-based ones. It is clear to me that the loss of revenue for communities impacted by this will greatly outweigh the benefit of whatever taxes are anticipated to be collected.

Today's political climate is uncomfortable at best, many like the idea of taxing the rich, but these yacht owners will pursue other options outside of Maine and the people that will suffer the consequences of LD 115 are the struggling but hardworking citizens that you have sworn to protect. The working waterfront and Maine as a whole is in the midst navigating our current administration's imposed tariffs which are bringing financial burdens to our doorstep, I cannot imagine piling on to that financial burden.

After listening to Senator Bennett & Representative Lookner explain their support for this bill, I am confident that they do not have a full understanding of what their proposal is or how it will impact our State, which makes me wonder why or how this has even come about.

The question of how this differs from the "hospitality tax" came up several times. That is an easy answer, we do not tax only the "penthouse suite" or "waterfront view" rooms, the tax is equal across the industry. If this bill is being proposed as an aquatic equivalent to the "hospitality tax" then all vessels visiting Maine waters should have to pay that.

It's no secret that mega yachts are not environmentally friendly, no vessel, at any size is, especially recreational vessels. The top three leading causes of climate change are fossil fuel industries, agriculture, & deforestation. To say mega yachts are the cause of so much damage on the Maine coast is inaccurate. True, they are part of the global problem, and I would advocate that their impact is disproportionate for their size. Senator Bennett claimed these vessels are discharging in Maine waters which is also inaccurate. Federal Law prohibits vessels



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from discharging blackwater tanks within 3 nautical miles from shore. For Casco Bay, that is 3 miles past Halfway Rock. As a marina manager, I see more small recreational vessels illegally discharging tanks than I have ever seen or heard about on large yachts which often have strictly enforced regulations. I am not advocating that these vessels are friends of the environment, but I think it is important to have correct information when making impactful decisions.

I am heavily involved within the yachting industry and would be happy to help anyone who is interested better understand this niche market and how it affects our State, both negatively and positively.

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns. I appreciate all you do for our wonderful state.

Laura East
Marina Manager
Strouts Point Wharf Company
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STROUTS POINT WHARF COMPANY

Laura East
Freeport
LD 115

April 4, 2025

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