

Testimony by Will Fisher

In Support of L.D. 691

An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Further Investment in Maine-based Businesses

April 8, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

My name is Will Fisher. I am the Co-Founder of Kit Non-Alc. I live in Portland, ME and I am testifying in support of L.D. 691, *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Further Investment in Maine-based Businesses*. I want to thank Senator Pierce for sponsoring this bill, and Senators Curry and Daughtry and Representatives Fecteau and Sargent for their support as co-sponsors.

Kit Non-Alc was founded in 2021 by myself and my business partner, Rob Barrett. Kit produces craft non-alcoholic beer, which is a growing segment in the beer market; in fact, the only growing segment today. We're a modern, lean, CPG company and due to our limited assets (we don't own any equipment or real estate) borrowing via debt is mostly out of the question. Because of this, fundraising through equity became an early topic of conversation at Kit.

We were introduced to Maine Venture Fund (MVF) early on and it was clear they would be a great fit for our organization. They offered to lead our seed round and made a sizable financial investment that was the catalyst for many subsequent investors to confidently join our growing group of shareholders. I'm happy to say that we closed our seed round in October of 2024. Kit now employs 11 people, many living in Maine, and has a clear path forward to growth and success.

Here is some background on MVF and the implications of L.D. 691 on businesses like Kit:

Maine Venture Fund (MVF) has been investing in small businesses in Maine for the past 27 years and today remains the *only* venture fund that is focused 100% on Maine-based businesses. As Senator Pierce described, MVF was formed to identify the highest potential early-stage companies in the state and help them secure funding. Often these companies are too risky for traditional forms of capital like bank debt, which is when MVF typically steps in not only fund the company but more importantly to catalyze other sophisticated investors to do the same, leveraging each MVF dollar roughly 7 to 1 historically. Indeed, Maine Venture Fund has earned a reputation as a trusted source to which investors can turn for guidance regarding investments into our state.

Maine is at an inflection point. In recent years, we've seen an influx in population due to migration patterns influenced by Covid and climate change, and the nascent startup ecosystem in the state has been bolstered by several institutions launching new entrepreneurship programs. This said, startups in Maine still face an outsized hurdle in finding growth capital relative to their peers in more urban hubs.

To address this gap more robustly and best support this new wave of companies, the Maine Venture Fund Board approved a 10-year strategic plan in May of last year with the goal of accelerating MVF's pace and volume of investments. This bill is the foundation of that strategy. The MVF team is also working simultaneously to pursue supporting capital from the private sector, has applied for multiple federal grants, and is exploring programs through Maine's Congressional delegations.

In summary, LD 691 would right-size the important work that MVF is doing to a scale that better fits the needs of the growing startup sector today, and for that reason I thank you for your consideration of this bill and I hope you will vote to approve it.