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DOVER HANDY STOP 251 East Main Street, Dover Foxcroft, ME 04426
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Dear Senator Tepler (Chair), Representative Doudera (Chair), and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1306. My name is Michelle Atherton, and I manage the Maine Handy Stop stores, a small-chain of neighborhood markets that serve rural communities in central and northern Maine. We are proud to be a reliable and convenient source for fresh food, especially for our customers who may live 30 or more minutes from the nearest full-scale grocery store. Many of our customers rely on us not just for snacks and household staples, but for affordable meat, deli items, and produce—often on fixed incomes, SNAP budgets, or limited transportation.

I'm voicing our concerns about the upcoming prohibition on polystyrene packaging for raw proteins. While we do our best to be eco-friendly where it fits within our business model, the reality for small, rural grocers like us is that this change adds another layer of complexity to an already challenging landscape.

For us, raw protein isn't just another product—it's a vital, high-turnover category that helps our customers stretch their grocery dollar. Many of the meat products we sell come packaged in expanded polystyrene trays. These are used by regional and national suppliers not only because they're cost-effective, but because they preserve the quality and safety of the protein during transport and shelf life.

Replacing these trays with alternatives is not as simple as it sounds. Suppliers haven't fully transitioned. As a result, we're stuck in the middle—caught between uncertain supply chain logistics and state-level compliance deadlines. Our meat manager, Errol, said it best the other day: *"We're just trying to serve our neighbors good food they can afford. When you start making it more expensive and harder to get, folks end up with fewer options—and that's not fair to them."* Errol also raised concerns about delivery delays we've already seen this year: *"Sometimes we don't even know what packaging we're getting until it arrives. And if it's not compliant with the new rules, what are we supposed to do—throw it out? Send it back? Wait another week for a replacement?"*

Small markets like ours do not have the buying power of large supermarkets. Nor can we absorb the higher costs of eco-alternatives without passing that burden on to our customers. More than 60% of our customers live within a 15-mile radius and shop with us weekly. Many are elderly or do not drive. They depend on us for fresh, affordable protein, and for them, even a \$.50 or \$1 increase per package matters.

We are asking the Committee to consider an **exemption** or **grace period/extension** for small, rural retailers like us, particularly until supply chains stabilize. We need time because our suppliers need time. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Atherton
Business Manager