

LD 1376 An Act to Increase the Acceptable Level of Alcohol in a Low-alcohol Spirits Product and to Increase Availability of Those Products

Dear Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

My name is Rick Gowell, and I am the owner of Gowell's Shop 'n Save, an agency liquor store located in Litchfield, as well as a co-owner of three other grocery stores throughout Maine, one of which is not an agency store. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong opposition to LD 1376**.

I regretfully cannot testify in-person today as I have previous industry trades show commitments.

Redefining agency-level spirits products is a deeply misguided and unfair proposal. As someone who operates stores under both business models—agency and non-agency—I have a firsthand understanding of the differences, obligations, and significant investments required to run an agency store.

Agency stores like mine bear higher costs and stricter requirements than those retail stores that sell only beer and wine. These include:

- **Higher insurance premiums** — approximately 4% more than our base policy, directly attributable to our agency designation.
- **Extensive security systems**, including high-resolution cameras and loss-prevention protocols, specifically for the handling of spirits ABV %, agency-level products.
- **Stringent inventory and storage standards** that ensure product integrity, availability, and compliance with state requirements.
- **Higher licensing fees**, which are a direct investment in the state's regulatory oversight and system integrity.

We have willingly and responsibly taken on these requirements because we believe in the value of the agency store model and the role it plays in maintaining responsible access and control over certain products. But removing product exclusivity from agency stores undermines the entire model—and deteriorates the investments we've been required to make.

This proposal doesn't level the playing field—it *tilts* it, unfairly punishing agency stores while benefiting retailers who have not had to meet the same rigorous standards.

At Gowell's, we take pride not only in providing responsible retail service, but also in being a cornerstone of our community. When our businesses grow, so does our

capacity to give back—whether it’s sponsoring youth sports teams or local scouts or reinvesting in store upgrades that support jobs and economic development.

The State of Maine should be working *with* us, not against us. LD 1376 makes it harder to grow, harder to reinvest, and harder to continue being the type of community-focused business that our towns rely on. I urge this Committee and the Legislature to support business growth, not stifle it with unfair policy changes that chip away at the foundation of what agency stores have built.

Please vote **“Ought Not to Pass”** on LD 1376.

Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Gowell

Owner, Gowell’s Shop ‘n Save

