



HANDY STOP 2 Bridge Street, Howland, ME 04448
LEE HANDY STOP 2789 Lee Road, Lee, ME 04455
DOVER HANDY STOP 251 East Main Street, Dover Foxcroft, ME 04426
95 HANDY STOP AND DINER 62 Lagrange Rd, Howland, ME 04448

Dear Senator Hickman (Chair), Representative Supica (Chair), and the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Michelle Atherton, and I serve as the Manager of the Maine Handy Stops, a locally owned and operated chain of four small grocery and convenience stores serving rural and suburban communities across Maine. **One of our stores operates as a licensed agency liquor store, and the other three do not**, which gives me a unique, direct, and balanced understanding of how both license types function within our state's regulatory framework. I'm here today to speak in **strong opposition to LD 1376**.

LD 1376 '**An Act to Increase the Acceptable Level of Alcohol in a Low-alcohol Spirits Product and to Increase Availability of Those Products**' proposes an expansion of 'low volume' spirits to non-agency stores—a move that would deeply disrupt the balance we currently have and directly harm agency store operators like ourselves.

Agency liquor stores take on a very specific and significant set of responsibilities. We are required to meet a higher standard of inventory management, reporting, and compliance. We're trained to properly handle, secure, and store high-proof alcohol, and to uphold Maine's strict age verification and sales laws. We also provide a consistent, year-round availability of Maine spirits.

This bill undermines the system and agency retailers by redefining ready-to-drink spirits. I can speak to this personally, because I manage both types of stores. And I can tell you without hesitation: agency stores have made substantial investments—financially and operationally—to maintain their status and to serve their communities reliably. Diluting this exclusivity removes the incentive to maintain those investments.

Additionally, there's a very real, very practical concern on the retail floor. **Cooler and shelf space are already limited**, particularly in smaller-format stores like ours. Beer and wine already take up significant space in our coolers and shelves —space we're constantly strategizing to optimize. Introducing low-volume spirits into that mix, without adding square footage or updated infrastructure, just isn't feasible. It's not simply a matter of more inventory—it's a matter of **space, compliance, and storage logistics**.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Atherton
Business Manager