

**LD 1181 Testimony from Diana Merenda, Town of Surry, to the
Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
April 15, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify against LD 1181.

- My name is Diana Merenda. My husband and I are American citizens who fled to the Town of Surry as NY Covid Refugees! We are retired from careers in banking and financial services. I've also served two terms as mayor in our previous village, and taught the capstone management course to undergraduates as a part-time CUNY adjunct. Ironically, later this month, I'm scheduled to teach my second Adult Ed class to participants who want to learn how to become successful short-term rental hosts, help defray the ever-increasing costs of living, and expand their own personal socialization experiences at the same time – all of which is exactly what happened to the two of us! Because we have achieved a perfect 5.0 scoring, we have earned “Super Host” status for three consecutive years. It's been a lifesaver for us and for this and other reasons we oppose LD 1181.
- Luckily, we have more bedrooms that we need and that has allowed us to welcome Airbnb guests such as summer tourists as well as occasional travel nurses on the off season. Today we live primarily on my social security benefit and that is why we rely on our Airbnb income to give us enough funds to pay our taxes. We are grateful that Airbnb has a mechanism in place through which the State of Maine gets its designated tax revenues immediately and I don't have to calculate or administer anything.
- We love serving breakfast to our guests in the morning where we share *comedere*, *conversation* and most of all *connection* to the State of Maine. Every morning, we discuss what our guests did yesterday and what they are going to experience today. We laugh together and bond sometimes so intensely that one of the guests will remind the other that they need to leave like 7 minutes ago to board the Acadian Boat tour in Bar Harbor so that they can be done in time to have a to-die-for dinner at The Reading Room!
- Without exception, our guests hug us when they leave – which is only after a request for a group photo – and then add something like ‘we came as guests but we leave as friends’. Sometimes there are tears to say goodbye. It's been an extraordinary experience that builds trust and camaraderie, and which then flies away or drives long distances to ‘spread the word’. There are times that I actually have thought that in some way we are contributing to a better America by forging connections one family at a time.
- We live in a home. It's not a hotel. It is absolutely residential and the guests we receive are treated like members of the family but without the arguments! We receive 1099s from Airbnb for our tax filings and we pay people to clean and mow and wash and iron and sell us food we serve and and and on and on! Revenues are shared in so many ways.
- Please honorable ladies and gentlemen, do not take this away from us. Rendering us “commercial” means we would close down this little revenue-producing hobby, and it will add nothing to create housing opportunities because we are not looking for tenants. Just some chances to make friends and help us afford staying in our home in beautiful Main. I urge you to please oppose LD 1181 as presented.