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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE TAXATION COMMITTEE

OPPOSED TO LD 1386

*An Act to Provide Emergency One-time Relief from the Wild Blueberry Tax for Sellers in Maine and Partial Relief for Processors and Shippers*

April 23, 2025

Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and members of the Taxation Committee, I am Craig Lapine, Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), speaking in opposition to LD 1386, *An Act to Provide Emergency One-time Relief from the Wild Blueberry Tax for Sellers in Maine and Partial Relief for Processors and Shippers*.

Maine's iconic wild blueberry industry is a vital part of the state's heritage and plays a crucial role in sustaining rural communities Downeast and beyond.

In 1945, Maine wild blueberry growers identified the need to invest in scientific research to grow their industry. Maine's wild blueberry tax was the outgrowth of their advocacy and eventually led to the creation of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine. In the following decades, the Commission has invested the tax revenues into critical research spanning plant physiology and pest management to wild blueberry nutrition and health benefits. Funds have also supported national school lunch marketing campaigns and international trade efforts.

The Commission serves as the authoritative voice for Maine's wild blueberry producers, with its members and executive director uniquely qualified to understand and champion industry needs. After careful consideration of the tax issue and extensive consultation with producers, particularly during challenging economic conditions for growers and processors, the Commission has reaffirmed its support of the current tax structure. We support this decision and their commitment to engaging directly with stakeholders throughout the process.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at the work session.

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