

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and esteemed members of the committee on Marine Resources.

My name is Alex de Koning, and I am part owner, and CEO of Hollander and deKoning Shellfish Farms in Bar Harbor Maine which employs 18 people year round. I moved to the US at 14 years old from the Netherlands where my family has been farming mussels since the 1770's, I graduated from Umaine with an engineering degree and at age 21 I became a US citizen. I am happy to provide testimony to you today in support of 1596 "An Act to Support Maines Sea Farmers." I apologize for not being there in person, as spring is a very busy time on the farm and I couldn't in good conscience get away.

Much of this bill is to do with the ability of a lease to be subtly amended without needing to go through the year long and labor intensive amendment application process. To give you an idea of what framework we currently find ourselves in I will give you a couple of examples.

When we took over our oyster farm, the cages were tied in strings of 8-15 cages anchored using 150lb mushroom anchors. These caused significant issues for us, and the neighbors because cages just weren't staying put. We have the ability to make and deploy concrete blocks relatively easily, but were not allowed to upgrade the troublesome anchor system without a drawn out amendment process. Similarly we were not permitted to switch from floating six bay cages, to floating hexyl cages, even though practically speaking on the water they have no different impact. They both make a line of cages a boat cant go through.

There is also a clause allowing applicants to pay a third party for a site dive and site visit to base the site report off. The goal of this is to get the DMR the information it needs as quickly and effectively as possible. Expediting a process that stretches on years is worth much more to most applicants than the money one would have to spend on a site dive. To give you an idea of how long things take, I applied for a lease in 2019, and this winter the DMR granted me 40% of what I applied for, and I'm still not able to put gear in the water because I'm still waiting on army corp who start their process after the DMR is done.

Finally the subcommittee to study equity issues is of great interest to me. Without an existing farming company to financially support me while going through this process I would never have survived. That blocks the vast majority of working class people from practically being able to start a farm, and that's not right.

I thank you for your time, and as always please feel free to reach out to me at Hollander.dekoning@gmail.com, or my cellphone (207) 479-4346. Thank you.