



April 24, 2025

The Honorable Chip Curry, Senate Chair
The Honorable Traci Gere, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
State House, Room 206
Augusta, ME. 04333

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Housing and Economic development:

My name is Sebastian Belle and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA). The MAA is the oldest state aquaculture association in the country. We are a volunteer membership association whose board of directors is selected to represent the diversity of the aquaculture sector in terms of species, production method and company size. Irrespective of company size each company has one vote. We represent Maine's aquatic farmers that raise finfish, shellfish and sea vegetables. Our farmers annually produce over 100 million dollars in farm gate revenue and directly employ roughly 700 Maine citizens year-round. We purchase goods and services from over 400 Maine businesses and our total economic impact is roughly 150 million dollars annually.

I apologize for not being able to present my testimony in person I am running between three committees today and presenting on multiple bills. I am testifying today in OPPOSITION to LD 1664" An Act to Repeal the Dirigo Business Incentives Program". The Dirigo Business Incentives program has been an important program that has substantially helped our young new aquaculture farmers in the state. Many of these farmers struggle financially as they start up their farms or seek financing to expand. Aquaculture farmers do not qualify for many of the more traditional agriculture programs designed to assist new and beginning farmers. Aquaculture is the only marine resource sector that has grown over the last twenty years. Many traditional fisherman and their children are diversifying into aquaculture. The economic development associated with the growth of the aquaculture sector is proving to be a powerful tool in the preservation of the states working waterfronts and coastal communities. Dirigo has proven to be a crucial tool in the start up of economically viable aquaculture farms and it's elimination will significantly negatively effect our sector. I ask you to vote **Ought NOT to Pass** on LD 1664.

Thank you for your attention, I would be glad to answer any questions you may have at the work session.

Sincerely,

Sebastian M. Belle
Executive Director