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Testimony

of

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RE: Testimony in support of LD 1596 “An Act to Support Sea Farmers”
& LD 1722 “An Act to Simplify the Regulation of Aquaculture Leases”

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, thank you for the opportunity to speak today AND thank you for all the work you represent us, the people of your communities. My name is Dan Devereaux.

If you’ll humor me for a moment — imagine being a 25-year-old, third-generation lobsterman. You’ve worked through DMR’s rigorous student program during high school and maybe college, fishing out of an 18’ Eastporter. You’ve saved and planned, and now you’re ready to invest in a bigger boat, better tech, and more traps — maybe even hire a crew. It’s risky, but it’s your future and it’s the life you know, so you go for it. Then all a sudden, DMR steps in and tells you you’ll have to wait two years before you will be allowed to use the new vessel and technology, resulting harvest setbacks, financial hardships, and possibly complete bankruptcy for you. Does this feel right?

Well. That’s what it feels like to be a young sea farmer in Maine today.

State regulations that **haven't** kept pace with sea farming are like navigating with a paper chart in a world of GPS. The tides have changed, the tools have evolved, but we're still being forced to steer by outdated maps. Instead of helping us grow sustainably and efficiently, the system holds us back, stuck in yesterday's waters.

I'm a U.S. Navy veteran, a retired law enforcement officer, and now the Coastal Resource Manager for the Town of Brunswick. I'm also a Maine delegate to the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association, and my family owns Mere Point Oyster Company — a local oyster farm we founded in 2014. I've spent my life on the water, most of it in and around shellfish. For the past 11 years, my work has focused on ecosystem health, water quality, shellfish propagation, and sustainability. Today, I'm here as the owner of our farm — where my sons and our team grind out 10-12 hour days one after the other.

I'm proud of them. I'm proud of every sea farmer. But we are all frustrated. DMR's decisions have real consequences for real people — families who depend on this work to survive. Unlike most sectors of employment, farmers don't have guaranteed salaries, benefits, or pensions. They grind hard, navigating a regulatory system that's neither fair, nor modern, nor designed to support sustainable aquaculture growth. There are several occurrences where the DMR regulatory PROCESS has sea farmers back. I hope that you get to hear some examples throughout this process.

Our farm operates in the shallow subtidal area of Maquoit Bay — a place our families have fished, clammed, hunted and lobstered for generations. We have 22 farmers work annually — 12 of them are full-time, year-round, with benefits. Six are family members. None of our full-time farmers are over 40. That should tell you something about the next generation's commitment to this industry.

The responsible growth of shellfish farming is essential to preserving Maine's working waterfronts. But coastal gentrification is rapidly outpacing the growth of sustainable aquaculture. As property values soar

and working people are pushed inland, the fabric of Maine's coastal heritage is being torn apart.

This is exactly why I support the spirit of LD 1596 and LD 1722. We need a regulatory system that recognizes the realities of today's sea farming — one that empowers sustainable growth, not stifles it.

Again, thank you for your time, consideration and allowing me to speak to you today.

Respectfully submitted,

EXAMPLES OF:

We farm oysters on about 36 acres around the Mere Point Peninsula. We're five years into a 10-year DMR lease. When we applied, we had to list every piece of equipment — even boats and motors — that we'd use over the next decade. Fast forward to winter 2023: we invested over \$100,000 to build a new work float with husbandry equipment to support our growing farm in 2024. The float would sit in front of our own shorefront property — not on the lease — and would not store or grow oysters. This is standard practice up and down the coast that I have witnessed over my years— from lobstermen staging gear, shellfish rafts for wet storage to mooring contractors working floats.

As a courtesy, we notified DMR before deploying it. The response? A blunt email warning us that deploying the float could result in lease revocation. We were told we'd need to file a lease amendment just to use the float.

No problem — we applied immediately. But here we are, almost a year later, still waiting. That float could have created two full-time jobs last summer. It's still sitting idle today.

In 2021 we decided that we would shift our anchoring system, from mushroom anchors, which are known to scar and cause damage to the ocean floor, to helical screw in anchors, which are well known to be the

most environmentally friendly way to anchor to the ocean floor. We wanted to make this change in the fall, we realized this would take an amendment to the lease. We applied, and it took nearly a year to decide. These are easy decisions, especially if we can find more environmentally ways to operate. DMR should be encouraging this innovation. EVERY shellfish farmer and seaweed farmer is driven by sea farming sustainability properties.

