Jeremy Dougherty
Witham Family Hotels
LD 1476

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Jeremy Dougherty and I am the Managing Director for Witham Family Hotels. We are a family-owned business with seven hotels in the Bar Harbor area employing over 500 people.

While well intended to address homelessness in the state of Maine, adding a surcharge to lodging to address it unfairly penalizes Mainers who remain our biggest market of visitors. They are already paying for these services in their taxes, and you want to add a secondary fee on top of it. Are you also going to assess the same $2.00 to the lumber industry for every truck that comes out of the forest? A fee to every manufacturing company? Every church that collects donations on Sunday service? Why is the lodging industry being targeted to address a problem within the state that our tax dollars are already being collected to address? There is no tie from lodging and the homelessness rate in the state to bring these two together in a reasonable fashion and justify this kind of bill that targets lodging as the area to take on this cost and burden.

Additionally, homelessness as a recipient cause for this fee is addressing the problem but not solving the root cause. Rapidly rising heating bills, utilities, and property taxes all over Maine are adding to the already critical problem of overpriced real estate and rents. These cost-of-living expenses are so high people cannot afford to live and are forced into being unhoused. If we don't solve that first, this fee will just be throwing money at a problem but will never resolve it. All the while also negatively impacting the cost of visitation in a market already on the decline and with so many uncertain economic factors in our future.

Respectfully, and despite the best intentions of this bill and the need to address and support the unhoused, I feel this bill will only negatively impact travel in Maine and cannot support it.