

Alexis Miller
East Boothbay
LD 1476

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Alexis Miller, and I am the Experience Curator for Cottage Connection of Maine, a local business deeply connected to Maine's tourism and hospitality sectors, right here in Boothbay. I am writing today to express my strong opposition to LD 1476, "An Act to Support Maine's Homeless Shelters by Imposing a Fee for Booking Hotels, Short-term Rentals and Recreational Vehicle Camping Reservations."

Maine's tourism and hospitality industries, comprised largely of family-run businesses like ours, are the economic backbone of our state. We employ over half of the state's workforce, and make significant contributions to both our local economies, and the state budget every year. These businesses, from small inns, to summer cottages families rent to be able to afford them, to campgrounds along our coast, are currently navigating a vulnerable period, and imposing additional costs will undoubtedly discourage visitation, further weakening the cornerstone industries that are so vital to communities like ours in Boothbay.

First, Maine already faces a challenge in attracting visitors. We saw a significant 9% drop in summer visitation in 2024 compared to the previous year, indicating a growing reluctance to visit our beautiful state, as well as the increasing economic uncertainty nationwide. Adding any extra cost, regardless of whether it's labeled a "fee" or a tax, will only exacerbate this decline, impacting businesses throughout Maine. Second, Maine's statewide lodging tax is already among the highest in the nation, putting us at a competitive disadvantage compared to states with lower travel costs. Our neighboring New England states are already outperforming us in lodging occupancy rates this year. Imposing this additional \$2.00 fee will further widen this gap and reinforce the perception that Maine is an increasingly expensive destination for travelers considering places like Boothbay for their vacations. It doesn't matter if you're spending \$100 or \$1,000 a night-- everyone will notice the nickle and diming that this state is trying to impose on our visitors. Finally, while the intent of supporting homeless shelters is commendable, burdening the tourism sector with this "fee" is a precarious approach, especially given the current economic uncertainty. It's a tax in all but name, making overnight stays more expensive for both tourists and Mainers, who make up 30% of our vacationers statewide, and risks undermining our largest industry that contributes significantly to our state's overall economic well-being, including the livelihoods of many in the Boothbay area.

In conclusion, I oppose LD 1476 because it imposes a new financial burden on Maine's vital tourism and hospitality industries at a time when they are already facing challenges, impacting communities like ours in Boothbay. This "fee" will likely deter visitors, worsen our competitive standing, and further strain an already vulnerable sector. I urge the committee to reject this bill and seek alternative, more sustainable solutions to support our homeless shelters that do not risk the health of Maine's economic backbone and the many jobs it provides in places like my hometown. Please vote ought not to pass.