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131st MAINE SENATE

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**Testimony of Senator Harold “Trey” Stewart
Presenting L.D. 191, An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding
Certain Business Equipment Tax Benefits
Before the Taxation Committee
February 14, 2023**

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and members of the Taxation Committee: I am Trey Stewart and I have the honor of representing the people of Senate District 2, which includes communities in Aroostook and Penobscot counties. I am before you today to present L.D. 191, An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Certain Business Equipment Tax Benefits. Another, possibly more appropriate name for this bill could be “An Act to Make Whole Foods Wake Up!”

As we all should be aware of, Maine’s lobster industry is one of the cornerstones of Maine’s economy. Therefore, to intentionally choose to prevent or hinder the sales of legally and locally produced, grown, or harvested products such as lobsters here in Maine would stack the odds even further against an industry that is already under siege by dark money groups. Unfortunately, this is currently happening in our state, with the most glaring example being Whole Foods recent outright ban on the sale of Maine lobsters.

When distributors act against local production and sales, we should react accordingly. In instances similar to and including the example I just mentioned, this legislation would make anyone acting in this way across all industries ineligible for the Business Equipment Tax Exemptions or Reimbursements. We shouldn’t be giving tax breaks and using Maine’s tax system to aid any organization attempting to undercut any key industry in Maine—and yet, that’s exactly what we’re doing right now. It has to stop.

Before she passed, my mother was a stern man on a lobster boat Downeast. I saw how hard these men and women work first-hand when I got to fish on the boat with her. It made me incredibly proud to know the kind of gritty and honest work my mother was doing and I know she would want me to stand up for this industry and fight for what is right. I recognize that this is a new approach for Maine to take, but when we our lobstermen are up against strong forces trying to shut them down through unelected and unaccountable groups with secret donors, we need to stand up for what’s right.

I would note that this bill would protect the interest of many Maine-based industries that help make up this great state. In cases such as the forestry products industry, there is a protection in

place and this legislation would not apply to products or commodities where a certification system is at the consent or request of the producer, manufacturer, or grower.

Today, it's Maine lobster, but if these same special interest groups decide to go after Maine blueberries, or Aroostook potatoes, or Maine's forest products sector next, we will all know we should have done more—and wish that we had. We have a long, storied tradition here of Maine's Governors and congressional delegation standing strong for our lobster industry—crossing party lines and fighting from the Blaine House to the White House and from Augusta to D.C. It's now our turn to take bold action in the Maine legislature and stand with our lobstermen and women and push back against these dark forces attacking a heritage Maine industry.

Thank you.