

Testimony of Nate Cloutier

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
January 22, 2023

In Support of LD 2088, "*An Act to Change the Number of Agency Liquor Stores Allowed in Certain Municipalities*"

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and distinguished members of Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs: My name is Nate Cloutier, and I am here today on behalf of HospitalityMaine representing more than 1,300 restaurant and lodging establishments of all sizes across the state. HospitalityMaine supports LD 2088, "*An Act to Change the Number of Agency Liquor Stores Allowed in Certain Municipalities*".

LD 2088 would increase the number of agency liquor stores the Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS), Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages and Lottery Operations (BABLO) may license in a municipality with a population between 10,000 and 15,000. The allowable increase would be from 6 to 7 agency liquor stores.

The hospitality industry plays a vital role in Maine's economy, contributing substantially to employment and revenue. This bill would benefit restaurants and lodging establishments that serve alcohol by enhancing accessibility and providing a boost to local businesses. Businesses, especially during the busy tourism months, rely on these local stores to stock their alcohol inventory. This will inevitably help some of our member businesses by providing additional options within their geographic area for procuring necessary supplies.

Businesses have also expressed the need to offer a wider range of choices to their customers. As such, menu and drink offerings are becoming increasingly unique and diverse. Permitting additional stores across certain municipalities provides the opportunity for a more diverse selection of alcoholic beverages which is essential for meeting evolving consumer expectations.

This legislation is an opportunity for local business to support local business. Local liquor stores often prioritize sourcing products from nearby breweries and distilleries, thereby promoting and sustaining local producers. This approach aligns with the culture of many restaurant and lodging businesses that aim to showcase regional offerings, contributing to the overall well-being of the local economy.

We would recommend making this bill into an emergency measure so that it could take effect ahead of BABLO's semi-annual assessment of available agency liquor store licenses.

We see this legislation as a common sense move that improves accessibility for restaurant and lodging establishments and supports local businesses. Please vote LD 2088 ought to pass. Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.