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Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler presenting
LD 2065, An Act to Amend Maine's Aquaculture Leasing Laws
Before the Joint Committee on Marine Resources

Good afternoon, Sen. Reny and members of the Marine Resources Committee. I am Allison Hepler and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. I am here today to present **LD 2065, An Act to Amend Maine's Aquaculture Leasing Laws.**

This is a bill from the Department, so I am confident that those coming after me will better be able to describe it and answer your questions. Aquaculture is an innovative industry in Maine, attracting a variety of entrepreneurs. It is a good addition to our marine economy. As a member of the Marine Resources Committee, I've been lucky to visit several sites, to meet with fishermen in the industry as well as community members and also attend a couple of public hearings in my community.

What I hear most often from industry is that the Department is thorough and professional, and also that it takes a lot of time to get through the process. To some extent, that is how it should be, although we don't want it to take so long that potential farmers leave in frustration. My understanding is that the changes in LD 2065 are designed to streamline some of the process with regard to notifications, public hearings and straightforward lease renewals.

Specifically, LD 2065 reduces the notice requirement for standard lease applications to the general public to specify that the notice must be published once in a newspaper. It increases from five to 25 the number of persons required to request a hearing on a lease renewal or a limited-purpose lease application. That said, the Department maintains its authority to hold a public hearing regardless of the number of requesters. Finally, it creates a process by which a person who holds a limited-purpose lease may apply to convert that lease into a standard lease, as long as it's for the same lease area and operations that were authorized by the limited-purpose lease.

Do we need other changes with respect to public notification and input regarding these applications? Yes. At a recent selectboard meeting, one of the selectboard members invited an oyster fisherman to our meeting. He is requesting another LPA and since we don't have a harbormaster, such applications are signed by another town official. We have never had an oyster farmer visit us before and I thought it was great public relations, not only for his own business, but also aquaculture in general.

With that, my expectation is that the Department will be speaking to the specifics of this bill, though I'm happy to answer any questions as I can. Thank you.