



Testimony of Garrett Mason
In Support of LD 603

An Act to Ensure That the Exemption of Certain Agricultural Buildings from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code Includes Maple Sugarhouses

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, My name is Garrett Mason, I am a resident of Lisbon Falls, and am a Partner at Dirigo Public Affairs. I am here today representing our client, the Maine Farm Bureau.

LD 603 seeks to clarify and reinforce the exemption of maple sugarhouses from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code (MUBEC), ensuring they are recognized as agricultural buildings, much like livestock barns or crop storage facilities. This clarification is necessary to remove ambiguity in the law and to protect Maine's maple producers from costly and impractical regulations that do not align with the realities of maple syrup production.

Maine has a proud history of maple syrup production, with over 450 licensed producers and countless home producers contributing to an industry that generates over \$55 million in economic activity annually. The state clearly recognizes maple sugaring as an agricultural activity, just as raising livestock or growing crops is. We also know that Maple sugarhouses serve a specific, seasonal purpose:

- Processing raw sap into syrup through boiling, which requires extensive steam ventilation.
- Short-term storage of sap and syrup, which does not require the airtight, energy-efficient structures mandated by MUBEC.
- Housing specialized equipment, often including wood-fired evaporators, which function best in open-air or semi-ventilated buildings.

As Representative Cooper noted in his testimony, inconsistent interpretation of MUBEC by local code enforcement officers has led to unnecessary and prohibitive costs for maple producers. Without explicit exemption, some sugarhouse owners have been required to comply with stringent building codes that were designed for year-round, climate-controlled residential or commercial buildings—not seasonal agricultural structures.

The costs of compliance, which can exceed tens of thousands of dollars, create a barrier for new and existing maple producers. Furthermore, the unintended consequence of requiring



airtight structures directly interferes with the essential need for steam ventilation during the boiling process, rendering compliance both impractical and counterproductive.

By passing LD 603, the Legislature will:

- Clarify and codify the exemption of maple sugarhouses under MUBEC.
- Reduce regulatory burdens that unnecessarily inflate costs for small and mid-sized maple producers.
- Ensure fairness and consistency across municipalities, preventing unpredictable enforcement.
- Support Maine's farming economy, which relies on diverse agricultural activities, including maple syrup production.

The Maine Farm Bureau stands with Representative Cooper and the Maine Maple Producers Association in urging swift passage of LD 603 to protect this vital industry from overregulation. Maine's maple producers deserve clear, consistent, and fair treatment under the law.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.