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Testimony of Nate Cloutier

Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
March 24, 2025

In Support of LD 556, *"An Act to Preserve Heating and Energy Choice by Prohibiting a Municipality from Prohibiting a Particular Energy System or Energy Distributor"*

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Nate Cloutier, and I am here today on behalf of HospitalityMaine, representing Maine's first-rate restaurant and lodging industries. I am also testifying on behalf of the Maine Tourism Association (MTA). MTA has been promoting Maine and supporting members in every type of tourism business, such as lodging, restaurants, camps, campgrounds, retail, guides, tour operators, amusements, and historical and cultural attractions for over 100 years. HospitalityMaine and the Maine Tourism Association support LD 556, *"An Act to Preserve Heating and Energy Choice by Prohibiting a Municipality from Prohibiting a Particular Energy System or Energy Distributor."*

LD 556 would ensure individuals and businesses across Maine can continue to access the heating and energy sources that best suit their needs by prohibiting municipalities from restricting heating equipment based on fuel type. Our industries depend on a reliable mix of energy options to meet demanding operational requirements—from restaurants ensuring safe food preparation and maintaining outdoor dining spaces to hotels and resorts providing consistent guest comfort.

In Maine's long winters, flexibility in choosing energy systems is essential. For instance, many restaurants rely on natural gas to power essential kitchen equipment and maintain safe cooking environments. Without this energy option, restaurants risk degrading the quality of the food they prepare, limiting their ability to operate outdoor dining spaces, and facing increased operating costs that would likely be passed on to customers.

Beyond these direct impacts, maintaining diverse energy choices enhances the resilience of our energy supply. By ensuring that businesses are not forced into a single energy source, LD 556 mitigates the risk of a supply disruption that could affect service quality during peak demand periods or unexpected outages. During the storms of December 2023 and January 2024, many hotels and restaurants hosted utility linemen and those without power. This resilience is vital not only for daily operations but also for emergencies when reliable energy is critical.

Furthermore, preserving the freedom to choose among various energy options fosters healthy competition among energy providers, which can drive improvements in service quality and help keep prices competitive. This competitive environment supports ongoing investments in innovative energy solutions and creates greater economic opportunities.

LD 556 is a pragmatic policy that safeguards the operational integrity of Maine's hospitality and tourism industries. We respectfully urge you to support this measure, ensuring that our businesses maintain the necessary flexibility to serve our communities and guests effectively.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.