

Testimony of Nate Cloutier

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

April 9, 2025

In Support of LD 1376, *"An Act to Increase the Acceptable Level of Alcohol in a Low-alcohol Spirits Product and to Increase the Availability of Those Products"*

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Nate Cloutier, and I am here today on behalf of HospitalityMaine, representing Maine's first-rate restaurant and lodging industries. HospitalityMaine supports LD 1376, *"An Act to Increase the Acceptable Level of Alcohol in a Low-alcohol Spirits Product and to Increase the Availability of Those Products."*

LD 1376 amends the definition of "low-alcohol spirits products" by raising the maximum level of alcohol by volume (ABV) of a low-alcohol spirits product from 8% to 15%. The bill also provides that a low-alcohol spirits product may be sold by a person licensed to sell malt liquor for on-premises and off-premises consumption. Finally, it would authorize in-state wholesalers of malt liquor to sell and distribute low-alcohol spirits products.

First, our members view this as an opportunity to ease a persistent operational burden for restaurants and bars having to navigate multiple distributor relationships to source an increasingly complex array of products. By allowing our existing beer and wine wholesalers to carry and deliver low-alcohol spirits products, LD 1376 streamlines the procurement process. This efficiency ideally means fewer invoices, consolidated deliveries, and better inventory management, which are crucial benefits for small businesses operating with limited operational capacity.

Second, we appreciate that this would expand access to more diverse and innovative products, including a growing range of pre-mixed or ready-to-serve beverages. These options are especially valuable for restaurants looking to enhance their offerings without needing to invest heavily in mixology training, additional equipment, or expansive back-bar inventory. For venues that cater to fast-casual dining or operate in areas where staffing is especially tight, having more pre-made, consistent drink options allow them to better meet customer expectations while maintaining service quality.

Third, this legislation offers to ease the challenges associated with lingering labor shortages. Many

restaurants still operate below optimal staffing levels, including recruiting and retaining skilled bartenders, and the ability to offer high-quality, low-alcohol cocktails without requiring a trained mixologist can be a true asset. This would help to speed up service while maintaining consistency and quality. For businesses that depend on takeout and delivery as part of their revenue model, these options offer a consistent and compliant way to expand the “cocktails-to-go” menu that became vital during the pandemic.

By allowing licensees to offer these beverages and leveraging the established distribution network of beer and wine wholesalers, LD 1376 avoids creating unnecessary complexity or costs, giving restaurants more tools to stay competitive and meet shifting consumer demands.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to support LD 1376. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.