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THE MAINE SENATE
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LD 1551, “An Act to Support Maine Eating and Drinking Establishments by Allowing Vendors to Operate on the Premises of an Establishment with a Liquor License”
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
April 23, 2025

Good morning, Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

My name is Jeff Timberlake, and I represent the people of Senate District 17. I am here today to present LD 1551, “An Act to Support Maine Eating and Drinking Establishments by Allowing Vendors to Operate on the Premises of an Establishment with a Liquor License.”

LD 1551 makes a small but meaningful change to our liquor laws—one that could open up new opportunities for Maine’s food and hospitality businesses.

Over the past year, I’ve spent time talking with restaurant owners, hospitality groups, and people trying to break into the food business. I asked them: what would actually help? One issue they raised was a lesser-known restriction that’s holding businesses back.

Right now, if you’re a licensed food establishment with a liquor license, you can’t allow another licensed food vendor to operate inside your space. Even if both parties are fully licensed and following all food and safety regulations, that setup just isn’t allowed under current law.

This bill would allow it under clear conditions. For purposes of this bill, a “vendor” who is licensed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and/or the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry could operate within a “host establishment” that holds a liquor license. If alcohol is desired, the host would retain control of supplying it.

Let me give you an example. Let’s say Paris Pizza serves great pizza and solid cocktails. They’re licensed by both BABLO and DHHS; but because of staffing, they’re only open four days a week. Carol’s Cupcakes, another licensed business, wants to use their space on off-nights to sell cupcakes. Right now, she can’t because of the liquor license held by Paris Paige.

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This bill would allow that kind of partnership. Carol gets a space to sell her cupcakes. Paris Pizza gets a little extra revenue or exposure. And customers get more variety. Everybody wins.

Alcohol would still only be supplied and sold by the licensee, but staff working for the vendor would be able to serve it. This keeps current guardrails in place while making room for more flexibility in how businesses operate.

This isn't just for traditional restaurants. Inns and wedding venues, for example—spaces with licensed kitchens and liquor licenses—could benefit. Some will choose not to take advantage of it, and that's fine. But for those who want to collaborate and try new models, this gives them a path.

We've also been in contact with BABLO; and I understand they're looking to add two clarifying provisions to the bill:

- First, the host liquor licensee, their owners, managers, supervisors, or other employees authorized to sell alcohol would be required to be present and oversee alcohol sales while the vendor is operating. That ensures continuity and accountability.
- Second, instead of requiring responsible beverage training (which isn't a state requirement), vendor staff would sign the same required affidavits used statewide, confirming they haven't had violations related to alcohol service.

I'll let BABLO speak to the fine print, but I would support those changes.

Now, I probably don't need to remind this committee what the hospitality industry has been up against. Rising costs. Worker shortages. A drop in tourism—down 9% in visitors just last summer. And all of this while most restaurants are working with profit margins of 3-5%.

This bill won't solve every problem, but it's one practical step we can take. It costs the state nothing. It creates no new licenses. It allows existing businesses who are already meeting licensing standards to find creative ways to keep going. And for those looking to break into the food business without taking on huge equipment loans or long leases, this opens a door.

And this kind of flexible model could be especially valuable in small towns and rural communities where commercial kitchen space is limited and collaboration is key to survival. At the end of the day, this is about giving Maine businesses the chance to work together, adapt, and keep serving their communities in a changing economy. Later today, you will also hear from some of the hospitality businesses that would benefit from this change.

Thank you for your time and consideration.