

Testimony – Honorable Brian Langley "An Act to Extend the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative to December 31, 2031" February 5 2026

In Support of the Reauthorization of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (L.D. 2002)

Good morning, Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and members of the Marine Resources Committee.

My name is **Brian Langley**, I reside in Ellsworth and I'm the owner of the **Union River Lobster Pot** in Ellsworth. I also had the privilege of serving four terms in the Maine Senate, including two terms on this very committee, and I currently serve as the **chair of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative**. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in strong support of the reauthorization of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative, L.D. 2002.

I'm here wearing three hats: as a small business owner, as someone who has bought and served Maine lobster since 1986, and as someone who has watched, from the inside, how effective coordinated marketing can be for this industry. In my roughly 40 years as a business owner, I cannot tell you how many times I have watched people respond to a slowdown in the economy by cutting their advertising; my habit has always been the opposite. When things slow up, that is when I increase my marketing, and that philosophy is a big part of why my doors are still open after four decades while so many others are not.

At my restaurant, lobster is not just another menu item; it is the heart of what we do. Guests come from all over the country, and when they order Maine lobster, they are looking for something very specific: an authentic product, a connection to the men and women who harvest it, to the clean, cold Gulf of Maine, and to the traditions and working waterfronts that make this fishery unique. And to meet the locals who serve it with a smile.

That connection—that story—does not tell itself. It is the result of years of focused, professional marketing through the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative. The Collaborative has helped define, sharpen, and share what sets Maine lobster apart: its sustainability, its traceability, and the family-run, small-business backbone that supports coastal communities up and down our coast.

I want to acknowledge right up front the concern that brings us here today: in part, hearing from lobstermen in my area, that landings were down this year, even as the boat price was the third highest on record. Those two facts can sound contradictory, but from where I sit as a buyer and a restaurateur, they tell one clear story: in a volatile world, strong, steady demand is what holds this fishery together. You do not walk away from marketing when the seas get rough; that is precisely when you keep a steady hand on the tiller.

Think about what happens if we step back now. If we pull back on marketing just because landings are down, we risk turning a cyclical challenge into a long-term problem. We create space for cheaper substitutes, such as "farm raised Spiny Lobster" a product that is not from Maine, for misinformation about sustainability, and for

other regions to capture mindshare and market share that took Maine generations to build. The Collaborative is our defense against that drift. It keeps Maine lobster top of mind with consumers, retailers, and chefs year after year.

I understand this personally because as a chef and small business owner, I do not have the time, money, or expertise to market my restaurant at scale. I can run a local ad or post on Facebook or on the radio, but I rely on larger organizations—the Maine Tourism Association, Hospitality Maine, statewide and local chambers—to give my business a presence beyond what I could ever afford on my own. It is not inexpensive, (40k in 2025) and I do not control every message, but without that shared marketing, I simply would not show up in front of many of the customers who now walk through my doors.

The Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative plays that same role for lobstermen and lobster businesses. Individual harvesters and wharf owners cannot build national campaigns, run chef outreach, manage social media, generate press, or pivot the message when conditions change in the marketplace. That takes a dedicated team with a clear mission: to grow demand for Maine lobster in all its forms, from whole live product to value-added items.

Since its creation in 2013, the Collaborative has used every tool in a modern marketer's toolbox: social media, in-person tastings, professional videos, recipe development, media placements, and partnerships with chefs and influencers. When the pandemic hit and restaurant dining collapsed, the Collaborative did not sit back and wait; it pivoted on a dime to target the home cook. Grocery chains saw growth in lobster sales, online companies experienced record-breaking demand, and "stay-at-home" chefs used Maine lobster to elevate meals at their own kitchen tables. Without a marketing team in place, ready to adapt that message, 2020 could have been a disaster for demand. Instead, we found new customers and new habits that persist today.

That is the power of steady, strategic marketing. It does not just react to good times; it cushions the bad ones. It finds new channels, new stories, and new customers when the old patterns are disrupted. That capacity, to scan the horizon and pivot quickly, is not something a single lobsterman, a single dealer, or a single restaurant can replicate on their own. It is only possible when we pool resources through a structure like the Collaborative.

Each year, working with the Collaborative's marketing team, we develop and refresh ways to keep Maine lobster relevant and desirable. We put more Maine lobster into customers' hands through new retail products, generate media stories that highlight the people behind the fishery, create recipes and content that make Maine lobster approachable for home cooks, host webinars for industry professionals, and promote events like Maine Lobster Week in September. The goal is simple but essential: increase awareness of lobster as a premium product, keep it in the consideration set for consumers, retailers, and foodservice, and ultimately increase demand.

From my vantage point as a restaurateur, I see the results every season. When customers value the story, they value the product. That allows me to maintain pricing that is fair to both the harvester and the diner, even when landings fluctuate. Strong branding and consistent marketing support tourism, support working waterfronts, and support the tax base in the very communities many of you represent.

If we were to let the Collaborative sunset, or just extend for a year, we would not simply be trimming a line item in the budget; we would be relinquishing control of Maine's most iconic brand at the exact moment it needs steady stewardship. Other regions, other species, and other interests are competing every day for the same plate space and the same consumer attention. Without the Collaborative, they will be the ones telling the story, for our customers, and about our fishery.

With the Collaborative, Maine continues to tell its own story: a sustainable, science-driven fishery, rooted in family businesses, delivering a premium product that is trusted around the world. That is not just good for lobstermen; it is good for restaurants, retailers, truckers, processors, and every small business that depends on a healthy, resilient lobster economy.

So yes, some lobstermen have reported that landings are down. That is exactly why now is the time to stay steady at the tiller. You do not shut off the lighthouse because the weather has turned; you keep it shining so the fleet can find its way home. The Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative is that light for this industry. It keeps Maine lobster visible, desirable, and top of mind, so that when conditions improve, as they inevitably will, the demand is there waiting.

In short, the Collaborative protects and promotes Maine's most recognizable brand, and in doing so, it protects the livelihoods of countless small businesses like mine and the coastal communities we serve. I respectfully urge you to continue your support and vote to reauthorize the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative. Maine's fishing families, restaurant owners, and waterfront communities are counting on that steady, reliable commitment.

Thank you for your time and for your dedication to Maine's working waterfronts. I would be glad to answer any questions.