

LD 493, “An Act To Allow Custom Slaughterhouses To Produce Cuts of Meat to Be Sold Commercially in the State”

**Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
March 9, 2021**

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:

I am Jeff Timberlake and I represent Senate District 22, which includes the Towns of Durham, Greene, Leeds, Lisbon, Litchfield, Sabattus, Turner, Wales, and Wayne. It is my pleasure to be here and offer my support for LD 493, “An Act To Allow custom Slaughterhouses to Produce Cuts of Meat to Be Sold Commercially in the State.”

Livestock producers throughout the state of Maine are suffering. A year or more ago, they either bred or purchased animals with the intention of selling the meat to feed the people of Maine. Then COVID changed all our lives, including the lives of those animals.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need for more processing in Maine. Last summer, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry authorized 90-day grants of inspection to three custom slaughter operations to allow more locally-raised meat to reach Maine people. This was a temporary solution that needs to be made permanent somehow. The existing custom slaughterhouses in Maine have the tools and expertise to help Maine farmers meet the demand for locally raised and processed meat. Mainers want safe, healthy meat that has travelled 50 miles, not meat that has crossed five state borders.

This issue is something I have struggled with every time it has come before the legislature in the past. It is important enough, though, that we need to address it and

create slaughterhouses that are meeting the same basic safety standards as a USDA certified slaughterhouse while at the same time supplying healthy and safe meat to serve the people of Maine.

One of the biggest obstacles facing slaughterhouses is the creation and the intimidation of the HACCP (hazard analysis critical control point) Plan. This plan is several inches thick and is a major deterrent. The Department needs to find a way to assist these facilities in instituting their own individual plans.

The custom slaughterhouses are the first step in solving the crisis that currently exists in the meat processing industry in Maine. Particularly in Aroostook and Washington Counties, farmers have animals that are ready to become food; but the state-inspected facilities have no capacity to process those animals. Many slaughterhouses are working at the maximum capacity and are booked through next year. Farmers are left to seek out facilities hundreds of miles away, sometimes out-of-state, eliminating any opportunity for profit. Farmers that are not able to find a slaughter facility lose their existing customers, eliminating future profits.

The Department needs to hire more inspectors, focus funding on helping custom slaughter operations expand to meet the growing demand, and work with the Department of Labor to increase the labor force. The Department was able to establish guidelines for processing poultry without an inspector being present during processing and needs to do the same for livestock.

Thank you for your time and consideration.