

Cameron Barner  
Portland

LD 1146 frightens me. I believe this bill to be more dangerous to my business and to my financial security than the COVID19 pandemic. The pandemic stopped all our sales to restaurants and had a profound impact on local and national seafood economies, but because I own my own business, with my partner Ben Hamilton, we are able to adapt to market disruptions and shifts in demand. This bill is a different kind of threat. This bill threatens our freedom to operate, adapt, and build on everything that I've worked for the majority of my life.

I have had the unbelievable blessing of knowing how I want to spend my career from the moment I found out it was an option to spend one's life working on the water. I have wagered over a decade of education and work on coming home to Maine to build a business working on the water. I've spent years in school, and years working farm-hand jobs, and more years working part-time in kitchens just so I can finally get to the point of building a business that could maybe someday support myself and my future family. If this bill were to pass, it would ultimately mean that my time leading up to this point has been largely wasted. This bill will immediately devalue the business I have built, and ultimately prevent me from growing it to a place where it can support my partner and I financially.

Aquaculture is already a very very hard way to make a living... The leasing process is long, often more than two years long, which is an eternity for a small, owner operated business. It involves rigorous vetting of locations and intense efforts of community engagement. Under this bill, any lease over five acres would no longer be exempt from NURPA and Site development law, adding years of review to an already exhausting process. Add this to the ban on transferring leases that is also proposed in this bill, and you have successfully discouraged any and all entrepreneurs from entering this space. You will have successfully stopped progress in its tracks.

Like I said earlier, I have had a long journey to get to where I am, and I know I'm not alone in this journey. There are countless other young people, some of whom are speaking today, who have spent years working towards the goal of one day living and working as a part of Maine's budding aquaculture industry. These are intelligent, hardworking, passionate, young Mainers who are anxious to build a wholesome and sustainable industry in their home state. These are people we want and need to help revitalize our coastal economies and working waterfronts, and if this bill passes it will be so devastating to a nascent industry with such potential for the state of Maine, that we will, without doubt, lose this human capital. Once again, we will watch as a large group of young Mainers grow up only to leave our state because they cannot find meaningful work in the place that they love.