

My name is Ben Hamilton, and I own and operate an oyster farm in Casco Bay that I started in 2017. My dream is to create a viable business that makes the world a better place - something that will allow me to support my family financially and also look my three young children in the eyes and say, "this is what I do, and this is why I do it." When I discovered the many virtuous and sustainable qualities of farmed shellfish, I knew I had found a business I could pour my heart and soul into. What I didn't know, however, is just how difficult it would be to make a living on the water. Over the last four years I have invested my personal savings and unpaid time into this business, with hopes to see these investments and efforts eventually pay off.

I am here to testify in opposition of LD 1146 because it would have a detrimental impact to my business and the greater aquaculture industry in Maine. Many of my fellow farmers, no matter what they are growing, will be stunted on their journeys as well. It is hard enough to navigate the rigorous lease process that currently exists, and this deferred timeline of income makes farming in the ocean vulnerable and risky. There is an inherent hope in those of us that choose aquaculture that we can create something meaningful and profitable. Mother Nature already makes us work for it, and you can't just snap your fingers and have an aquaculture business in Maine; like all farming methods, the process and the product need to be nurtured and cultivated over time.

This legislation also proposes to take away our ability to transfer our leases, and thus our ability to sell our businesses. Our investments in infrastructure, equipment, and branding would all be for nought if there were no exit strategy available to us as small business owners when it comes time to retire, or, better yet, to hand down our businesses to our children for their safekeeping. I would argue these aren't even small businesses we're talking about here - they are microscopic - and we each need every advantage we can get for the aquaculture industry to have a fighting chance here in Maine. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ben Hamilton, Love Point Oysters

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