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Senator Miramant, Representative McCreight and Members of the Marine Resources Committee,

I have a conflict with another matter this morning and will either be late or may miss the hearing altogether. However, I wanted to provide brief testimony with regard to LD 1146.

Obtaining an aquaculture lease is not for the faint-of-heart. It is a robust process that only the stress-hardy- and young- need undertake. Young because it is a painfully slow process and at times it seems like an applicant's working years may end before a decision is made. In my 37 years in the shellfish business, which has included many years in the leadership of the Maine Aquaculture Association, the process has become more rigorous, and more detailed with ever increasing levels of review.

Despite the frustration of nearly every applicant, most feel that the Department of Marine Resources does an admirable job enforcing the laws; and the Bureau of Marine Patrol a similar job overseeing the farms. There is already robust regulatory oversight ensuring the long-term health of the aquaculture industry, the environment and the people of this state.

After investing in the fees, professional services and equipment, seed, equipment, facilities and labor to establish a farm, it is vital that leases continue to be transferable. The industry has long fought to educate lenders and investors about the industry and the ability to transfer a lease is one factor that enables industry members to attract investors. This is true whether the loan or capital contributions sought are from family members, commercial lenders, partners, or venture funds. If we, as a state are to offer meaningful, long-term jobs in aquaculture, there must be these safeguards that protect investment.

If we are to offer jobs to the youth of this state, we must allow a farm, and business, to have a natural life span, which means it must be allowed to grow. Owners must be free to invest in other farms, to acquire farms, and to organically grow their own farms. I'm on the downhill side of my career and personally have no desire to have a lease over 50 acres, an ownership interest in more than 10 leases nor total lease acreage of more than 100 acres. BUT, my children have been convinced that this is a meaningful lifestyle and they have chosen to remain working in Maine. Let's not artificially restrict their working careers or the careers of so many other Maine people. Let's allow them to succeed by growing their businesses as needed. Size is not evil, but size does mean greater capital; more jobs; a larger variety of jobs; better paying jobs; retaining youth in Maine. I urge you to vote OUGHT NOT TO PASS on LD 1146.

Lori A. Howell

