

Jonathan Steuber
Tenants Harbor
LD 1596

To Members of the Marine Resources Committee:

I am writing today in support of LD 1596.

My name is Jon Steuber and I live in Tenants Harbor. Since 2019, I have worked in the commercial fishing industry as a sternman aboard a lobster boat. While commercial fishing, I was fortunate enough to work with a captain who had the foresight to diversify the vessel's income through aquaculture by growing kelp. I also recently co-founded a company called Seascale, a Maine-based company dedicated to developing innovative aquaculture gear and practices for working fishermen. I am writing in strong support of LD 1596, which would modernize Maine's aquaculture laws to allow for greater flexibility in operational types and gear design within existing leases.

Aquaculture presents an incredible opportunity for Maine's coastal economies, however current leasing rules are restrictive when it comes to gear changes and innovations. They're designed around static, long-term leases, and they leave little room for experimentation or scaling up gradually. For many in the aquaculture field or, more specifically, commercial fishermen who are diversifying their businesses through aquaculture, that rigidity is a barrier to progress or a barrier to entry. However, this bill recognizes and addresses that by providing the tools for safe and responsible innovation in aquaculture without sacrificing oversight:

Defining "operational types" (surface, submerged, bottom) and allowing modifications within these categories

Allowing leaseholders to adapt gear and methods—as long as there is no increase in environmental or navigational impact

Reducing the cost and wait time of diving requirements for lease applications, by allowing for 3rd party certified divers

Creating a subcommittee to explore equity in aquaculture access and support for small-scale operators

In particular, I support the language in Section 4 and Section 6 which would enable aquaculture leaseholders to adjust gear and operational methods without triggering a full amendment. This flexibility is essential to promoting grassroots innovation from Maine's aquaculture and fishing communities.

Thank you for advancing legislation that reflects the real-world needs and challenges of Maine's working waterfront. LD 1596 would help ensure that aquaculture growth in Maine is not only sustainable—but easier to adopt and easier to adapt to new innovations in the industry.