

Jeff Davis
Freeport

Dear Senators and Representatives of Maine,

I am writing to address my concerns with the proposed Short Term Residential Rental Registration Ordinance that is currently taking place in my hometown of Freeport and to express my support for LD 1365 to prohibit municipalities from prohibiting short term rentals. I am a tourism professional, having owned and operated an international travel business for the past 15 years as well as a vacation rental business for the past 7 years. In this letter, I will try to share my perspective, both as an owner of a short term rental that I host on Air BnB, as well as my thoughts on the economic impact to our state and its ability to stay relevant in the rapidly changing world of travel and tourism.

First, I feel it is important to tell you how the proposed ordinance would affect me personally since I am an Air BnB host in Maine since 2016. In 2014, my wife and I bought land in Freeport and developed it into our dream home where we would settle down to raise our family. We chose Freeport because it was a community that welcomed visitors, where we would be able to live and to have a home that could be used as a short term rental at times to produce additional income for our family. Extensive thought, investment, and personal risk went into developing the property to make it an attractive place for us to live, as well as for guests to stay and enjoy all that Freeport has to offer. Our plan was to rent the entire house to guests for a period of time in the summer when we were away traveling, visiting family, etc. and the rest of the time, when we were home, we would rent a specially designed guest apartment to generate enough revenue to afford the mortgage, taxes, and other costs.

This past year has been devastating for us financially. My business, ActivSport Travel, focuses on international, educational travel for youth and university sports teams, school groups, etc. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have not had any revenues since February, 2020 and currently I am on state workshare unemployment until the global situation improves. The money we brought in this past year renting our home and apartment on Air BnB is the only way I have been able to provide for my family and avoid bankruptcy. If we were not able to rent our home or to get one of these rental registration permits in the future, we would lose our home and everything we have worked so hard for and risked so much to develop. My wife is a high school math teacher and we just had our first child 5 days ago, a baby boy, who now represents over 300 consecutive years of Maine born (or geographically Maine prior to 1820) children in my family. Needless to say, I have deep roots and interests in the success of our state's economic future. For Maine residents like us, who moved here with a plan and a dream for the future, it does not seem fair to institute policies 7 years later that could result in us losing everything.

Below, I will address two articles in Freeport's current ordinance proposal that I feel are the most detrimental to its success as a tourist destination of choice for many years to come:

Article IV: Operating Standards:

(b). Occupancy Limits - The proposed ordinance states that guests shall be limited to a maximum of two guests per legally permitted bedroom. This is inconsistent with how tourism accommodations are normally set up. Many hotel rooms, for example, have two queen beds and a pull out sofa for an occupancy of 4 or 5 guests in one room. It is important to note that people who rent short term rental properties like mine are generally families traveling together, who often want to share rooms, have

children in their rooms, etc. In our home, for example, we have a guest apartment with a king size bed and a single size pull out sofa that can sleep 3, normally a couple and a child. We have another large room with two queen beds and plenty of space (that is larger than most hotel rooms) that can sleep 4 people comfortably or offer an air mattress for the floor for families traveling with children. The proposed occupancy limit would not meet the needs of the type of travelers who are looking for a property like ours, and if enough occupancy is not available at homes in Freeport, they will simply travel somewhere else, which has detrimental economic impact to the growth and evolution of the community as a tourist destination.

Article VI: Limits on Annual Short- term rental Registrations: Short term rental properties like ours fulfill a need for travelers that hotels and traditional bed and breakfasts cannot. Our property is set on 7.5 acres of land and is a house large enough for multi-generational families or groups of families to stay together. Guests who choose our property are looking for privacy and a place where they can spend time together under one roof. If not enough properties like ours are available in Freeport, prospective guests will simply travel to another destination. Our property is also dog friendly and most guests choose us since most places either do not allow pets or charge expensive fees. On the other hand, we cannot provide services like breakfast, a front desk clerk, room services, etc. that hotels and B&B's provide, so it is important that they also exist for guests who are looking for that.

Freeport has long been a community that relies on tourism for its economy and it needs to evolve and adapt to the changing demands of travelers' needs if it wants to remain relevant and to be a destination of choice in the future. Honestly, I am not sure what the purpose of this limit on registrations would be... Is the goal to limit the number of visitors coming to stay in Freeport each year? If so, this seems counterproductive to the needs of our community, based on the number of businesses closing in town, even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. To limit the number of permits is not in the best interest of the growth of the community as a tourist destination since the demand for short term rentals will only increase, not decrease in the future. As a tourism professional who spends a significant amount of time studying tourism trends around the world, attending industry meetings, booking travel, etc. I am confident that short term rentals are essential to the maintenance and growth of Freeport as a destination of choice. Simply put, short term rentals represent the future of tourism, whether some people like it or not, and the town must adapt to the needs of prospective visitors or they will travel and stay somewhere else.

In addition to the two above mentioned articles, I am concerned about the relative financial burden placed on owners of short term rentals in the proposed ordinance. If the costs are too high for owners, they will simply not be able to afford to provide their services to prospective guests. It is important to remember that these short term rental owners are providing the community with accommodations options that traditional hotels and bed and breakfasts cannot provide, both from a privacy standpoint as well as from a capacity of collective space for guests to spend time together.. The new generation of travelers is looking for diversity in accommodations providers, and short term rentals, especially larger homes where friends and families can stay together are crucial to the relevancy of Freeport as a travel destination.

These properties provide much needed tax money to the town through occupancy taxes. For example, our property alone contributed \$6000 in occupancy taxes from Air BnB to the town of Freeport last year. If our property did not exist or was not permitted, the guests would travel to a different destination and the tax revenue would be lost to the town. There are also benefits of longer stays by guests who are more likely to inject tourism dollars into the community. Based on what our property

offers, and the associated nightly rates, our guests tend to be from a higher socio-economic level and stay longer (5-10 days in the summer for example) than most guests coming to Freeport staying in hotels and B&B's who have much shorter stays. Our guests contribute a lot to the local economy during their stays. In the "off-season" our guest apartment attracts couples with dogs, normally from Southern New England, New York, and New Jersey who choose our property thanks to its privacy and being dog friendly. Again, these people would not come to Freeport if a short term rental like ours was not available.

The last point I would like to make is in regards to potential disruption to neighbors by noise, etc. Platforms like Air BnB that allow hosts and owners to choose to accept reservations or not, based on the prospective guest's previous reviews, purpose of the trip, number of guests, etc. make it so that hosts can make the rules and expectations very clear before accepting a reservation. With traditional accommodations like hotels and B&B's, there is no way of knowing if a potential guest will cause issues during their stay. We are very selective in who we accept, and the one time we had an issue with people violating our "no parties policy" and noise after 8:00 pm, Air BnB asked them to leave the next day, no questions asked, we were able to leave them an objective review for future hosts. This type of setup means that guests want things to go well for future reservation opportunities, and as long as hosts are selective in who they accept, there should be less disruption than traditional accommodations settings.

My hope is that this letter has provided you with a perspective that will be helpful in shaping the future policies of short term rentals in Maine, and I hope that you will consider these perspectives when making your decisions in the coming weeks. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeff Davis
Founder/President
ActivSport Travel