



Wild Blueberry Commission OF MAINE

5784 York Complex, Suite 52, Orono, Maine 04469-5784

TEL: 207-581-1475

FAX: 207-581-3499

Eric Venturini, Executive Director

Testimony in Opposition to LD 395. An Act To Remove the Authorization for Temporary Signs To Be Placed in the Public Right-of-Way

Senator Diamond, Representative Martin, and esteemed members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Eric Venturini and I am the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine.

As the voice of Maine's wild blueberry farmers and businesses, I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to LD 395.

This bill limits peoples' right to place temporary signs in a public right-of-way and appears to provide free reign to remove any signs placed there. The Wild Blueberry Commission has no issue with the right of landowners to remove political signs that happen to be in the right-of-way adjacent to their property. That has no effect on Maine's farmers and businesses. However, in 2015 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Reed vs. Town of Gilbert*, that temporary signs cannot be regulated based on their content. Therefore, any legislation intended to address political signs must also address farmers market signs, roadside farm stand signs, and other seasonal agricultural signage. That is why the passage of this bill would pose a major problem to many of Maine's farmers and agricultural business.

Although 98% of our crop is frozen, approximately 1 million pounds of Maine wild blueberries are sold fresh during harvest season in any given year. If you've ever driven the airline road or the coastal route in July and August, you've surely seen signs for fresh wild blueberries, pick-your-own Maine wild blueberries, or farm stands. These businesses, as sometimes their sole marketing strategy, place signs along the road to inform the public, both Mainers and tourists, of the opportunity to purchase one of Maine's iconic foods, the wild blueberry. Many of these fresh pack businesses own brick and mortar shops along the road, open seasonally to sell not only fresh wild blueberries, but jams, pies, syrups, value-added products, and even the wares of other Maine farmers. Many of these businesses use roadside signage during the July and August harvest season to alert goers by to their seasonal farm products. Harvest time is when many fresh pack growers, who sell fresh, not frozen wild blueberries, earn most of their income for the rest of the year and signage is a critical part of their success.

It is incumbent that the laws regarding signage be as accommodating as possible to allow agricultural businesses and family farms to attract a steady stream of customers.

The Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine opposes this bill and suggests that you vote ought not to pass.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.