

Thank you Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and Members of the Committee:

My name is Will Fisher and I'm a resident of Portland. I'm here today as a Founder of Austin Street Brewery. I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on the proposed changes and add my voice in support of LD 1456.

Austin Street Brewery was founded in 2014 and we're honored to be celebrating our 11th anniversary on May 17th; if you're in the area, please join us at 115 Fox Street in Portland (shameless plug). We started Austin Street with our own money and have grown the business organically over the last decade. In fact, my co-founder, Jake and I, still own 100% of Austin Street. With great pride and dedication to Maine craft beer, we have grown the brewery to support 16 employees and have produced over 600,000 gallons of beer, which has been distributed all over Maine and New England.

Craft beer is not a get rich quick endeavor; in fact, it's not a get rich ever! We do this because we love going to work and we get a chance to create something that promotes community and builds meaningful relationships. Unfortunately, it's not all cold beer and good times. Costs have been accelerating since 2020 and most of our bottom line has been eroded. For example, in 2014 we charged \$105 for a keg of beer and 11 years later, we charge \$110 for that same keg (a 5% increase). All the while our cost of goods have gone up almost 40%. As a specialty product, we don't have the liberty to raise prices 40% like other markets; customers are already paying a premium to enjoy Austin Street instead of a national brand.

Maine craft beer is recognized around the country and the world. This creates incredible value and we rely on that reputation to keep the doors open. Our staff is made up of 100% Mainers, our industry requires us to work in-person, and all of our beer is brewed in-house. In a world of work-from-home and fractional services, traditional beer production has become a bit of an anomaly. There's no wrong way to brew a great beer, but it's important that Maine breweries are able to protect their craft and the "Maine brand" with a certain level of sanctity.

I've been a part of the Maine Brewers' Guild legislative committee for as long as I can remember and have been a part of several significant legislative changes. With my firsthand experience, I can assure you Austin Street would not be making beer today if it wasn't for these changes. LD 1456 does a great job of defining and protecting what makes Maine beer so special while allowing ALL Maine-based beverage producers the ability to flourish. These changes are simply the next step in a series of healthy updates. Our fearless Executive Director, Sarah Bryan, put it best:

"We're starting to see a proliferation of businesses representing themselves as craft brewers, but who technically only brew a tiny amount of beer just to satisfy the technical

requirements of their manufacturing license. By adapting the statute to ensure equal access-to-market for all beverage manufacturers, we will better ensure a fair and supportive playing field long term for Maine based job creation, small business manufacturing, and the continued health of locally made craft beverages.”

Thank you for your time and consideration today, and I ask for you to support LD 1456.

I’m happy to answer questions or speak further on the subject as needed.