

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

My name is Ryan Houghton. I am a resident of Portland and I'm writing today as the owner of Après. I appreciate the opportunity to voice my opinion and feelings on the proposed changes.

I grew up in northern Maine on a large potato farm, so had a long family history (and personal experience) in farming in our beloved state. After leaving the state and having a corporate career for a global company, I ended up retracing my family roots and started a hop farm in Maine in 2010. The farm entrenched me in the new and growing craft beverage scene over the last 15 years, which has been the most rewarding industry to be a part of due to the localized aspect and true sense of community in the industry.

I in turn ended up founding Après, a distillery/winery that produces cider and hard seltzer in Portland. We opened our doors in 2021 and have enjoyed growing within the community and beyond. We are very fortunate to feel successful in our ventures in spite of some global (COVID) and local (cost of doing business in Maine) challenges while growing our business over the last four years. We now employ around 30 people, and I feel as though we've made a very important impact on the community. It would be easier and cheaper to make our product elsewhere, but it is important for us to be from Maine.

As a local Maine business, and one of our growing number of local distillers, the current law allowing most anyone to pop up a retail shop without actually being "from Maine" and making the bulk of their product here is challenging. Actual locally made beverages are important to us. They are made by people from here, are creating jobs for Maine, and are important to our local culture and why people love and respect the "Made in Maine" appeal. The current law allowing retail licenses without meaningful connection to production requirements devalues our product, our local peer's products, and our state's strong reputation around craft products that people desire.

Thank you for your time and consideration today, and I ask for you to support this important legislation. I'm happy to answer questions or speak further on the subject as needed.

Ryan Houghton