

William Laliberte
Wiscasset
LD 2155

Thank you Senator Hickman, and Members of the Committee:

My name is William Laliberte and I am a representative of Bath Ale Works in Wiscasset, and I am submitting written testimony in opposition to LD 2155.

We opened our doors almost five years ago in an already competitive industry and have gotten through hard times thanks to community support as well as the advocacy of the Maine Brewers' Guild and other businesses within our industry. This last year has seen several brewery closings in the Midcoast region as the market continues to evolve and customer demands change. We continue to survive not only by producing quality product and providing a third space for members of our community and abroad, but because we are able to engage in healthy competition with other breweries and retailers. Access to market remains one of the most significant challenges for small producers, and policies that concentrate retail opportunities threaten that access and the diversity of locally made products available to consumers.

As you will recall, this Committee passed legislation last session to limit the number of on-premises retail liquor licenses that could be held by a manufacturer. Those limits were not arbitrary. They were the result of years of discussion among brewers and manufacturers who recognized that the absence of limits was threatening the integrity and sustainability of Maine's craft beverage industry. That legislation reflected a broad consensus among manufacturers and was carefully considered, thoughtful, and intentionally generous.

LD 2155 seeks to undo that work. By effectively doubling the number of retail licenses a manufacturer may hold and retroactively exempting certain licensees from the limits adopted in 2025, this bill would accelerate consolidation and further concentrate retail access under common ownership. The practical effect would be to make it harder for small, independent producers to compete for shelf space, tap lines, and consumer attention — while rewarding larger entities based not on production, job creation, or local investment, but simply on timing or scale of retail holdings.

I am also particularly concerned about the permanent exemption for licensees issued on or before May 23, 2025. Creating carve-outs based on license date introduces inequity into the system and disadvantages newer and smaller businesses trying to enter the market today.

Maine's craft beverage sector has thrived because state policies have supported local ownership, diversity, and competition. LD 2155 moves us in the opposite direction by encouraging consolidation and blurring the line between manufacturing and retail interests.

As a Maine brewery, Bath Ale Works has made significant investments in manufacturing capacity and local jobs based on the balance established in current law. Weakening those protections undermines the fair and competitive environment that has allowed Maine's craft beverage industry to succeed.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to strongly oppose LD 2155. Thank you for your time and consideration.