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

My name is Jenn Lever. I am a resident of South Portland, and I am here today as the President of Baxter Brewing. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you and to share why I strongly support this bill.

Baxter Brewing was founded in Lewiston more than 15 years ago with a simple but ambitious goal: to represent the state of Maine in a world-class way. Today, we employ 54 people in the Lewiston–Auburn area across brewing, packaging, quality control, sales, hospitality, and operations. We have invested more than \$10 million in brewing equipment, facilities, and infrastructure, all rooted right here in Lewiston, Maine. These are long-term investments that reflect our commitment to local manufacturing, skilled labor, and Maine’s agricultural and supply ecosystems. Being a manufacturer in Maine is not easy. Our costs—labor, energy, transportation, raw materials—are higher than in many other states. But we choose to operate here because we believe in Maine’s craft beverage legacy, and because this state has historically recognized the value of local production, fair markets, and community-based business. Brewing is not just branding—it is capital-intensive, regulated, operationally complex, and margin-thin work. Every batch we make requires equipment, ingredients, people, compliance, quality control, and time. What concerns me deeply—and why I am here today—is that the current system increasingly allows businesses to present themselves as breweries without making the same level of investment, commitment, or contribution to Maine’s manufacturing economy. As more restaurant outlets are permitted to monopolize market access while circumventing the traditional distribution network, true Maine-based producers like us are squeezed out—both physically and in the minds of consumers.

This creates two major problems.

First, it limits access and transparency. When retail entities vertically integrate without meaningful production requirements, it reduces shelf space, tap space, and consumer exposure for actual Maine-made beer. The market becomes less open, less competitive, and less honest.

Second—and equally important—it creates consumer confusion. Many patrons now believe they are supporting a local brewery when in reality they are buying from a restaurant group that produces little to no beer, employs no production staff, sources no local ingredients, and has not made the long-term manufacturing investments that true breweries make. This purposeful blurring of definitions undermines trust and devalues the work we do every day for very small margins.

As a Maine craft brewer, I see that the current law allows for a virtually unlimited number of retail licenses with minimal production requirements. This devalues the investment we’ve made in our employees, our equipment, and our community. We are already seeing a proliferation of businesses that technically meet the legal definition of a brewery, but in practice do not function as one. This is not just a branding issue—it is a structural market imbalance.

By updating the statute to ensure equal and fair access to market for all beverage manufacturers, this bill helps protect Maine-based job creation, real in-state production, and the long-term health of our craft beverage ecosystem. It reinforces that words matter, definitions matter, and fairness matters.

This bill does not limit innovation. It strengthens it—by ensuring that those who choose to manufacture in Maine are not disadvantaged for doing so.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration. I respectfully urge you to support this important legislation. I’m happy to answer any questions.