

Greetings Senators,

By way of introduction, I am a farmer and license-exempt food maker in Pownal. I am the lead public advocate for H. 401 and testified before the House Ag committee in its favor.

I have watched as the Department of Health has scrambled to address their concerns with this bill, which they have known about for two months, finally bringing proposed amendments to the Senate committee with only three weeks or so until adjournment.

I believe it is more appropriate for the Department of Health to take a step back and more carefully consider the elements of the Food & Lodging program.

In her testimony before the House Ag committee on March 12, just over a month ago, the Acting Director Julie Arel stated that the DoH wanted to begin to work together to address the needs of small operators. She admitted the provisions of the Food & Lodging program were created years ago and do not reflect today's financial and regulatory environment.

She admitted that structure of the Food & Lodging Program has been modified over the years to the point where it is "inconsistent and unclear." She noted that a "more comprehensive review is needed," and the DoH is willing to discuss the matter with legislators, bill advocates and Vermont small businesses "in the coming months."

Given that recommendation from the top of the organization, it is hypocritical and counter-productive to now rush to make last-minute changes cherry-picked from other states.

The link to her testimony follows:

https://www.google.com/search?q=vermont+house+agriculture+committee+meeting+videos+3-12&sca_esv=f4db438c9f87a94d&biw=1280&bih=551&sxsrf=AHTn8zpcE7t6CHg4iU7GV0Al3KJaszkJWQ%3A1745508171075&ei=S1cKaLyiBJii5NoP_eHQsAM&ved=0ahUKEwj88TT_PCMAxUYEVkFHf0wFDY4ChDh1QMIEg&uact=5&oq=vermont+house+agriculture+committee+meeting+videos+3-12&gs_lp=Egxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcjAiN3Zlcm1vbnQgaG91c2UgYWdyaWN1bHR1cmUgY29tbWI0dGVlIG1IZXRpbmcgdmlkZW9zIDMtMTIyBRAhGKABMgUQIRigATIFECEYoaAFIryZQ8QhYihdwAXgBkAEAmAGEAaABpwSqAQMxLjS4AQPIAQD4AQGYAgagAtUEwgIKEAAYsAMY1qQYR8ICBRAhGKsCwgIFECEYnwWYAwCIBqGQBqiSBwMxLjWgB8EfsgcDMC41uAfOBMIHBTauMS41yAcg&scient=gws-wiz-serp#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:62c100e0,vid:ZFsdVEWq8TM,st:0

The need to step back and take a deep breath is most clearly demonstrated by the DoH recommending that license-exempt food producers undergo health safety training beginning July 1, despite having no training plan investigation other than what Connecticut does. And, as a result, emergency measures must be included in the bill to accommodate this lack of preparation.

I highly recommend that the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare pass H.401 as submitted, recognizing that this bill was passed unanimously by the House Ag Committee, Ways & Means, and what appeared to be a unanimous vote of the entire House. And allow the Department of Health time to undertake the comprehensive plan they admit they need.

Thank you for your kind attention,

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