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April 29, 2015

To: Members of Senate Finance Committee

Re: HB1226—Inspection Fees for Retail Food Establishments

Dear Senators,

Thank you in advance for indulging my written testimony, while I spend our wedding anniversary with my husband...something I haven't been able to do in a number of years because of legislative calendars!

I ask you to please vote YES on HB1226

A short bit of history: we assume that the bill has come to your committee because of the title of the bill. However, this bill was never about a fee increase, or amount of fees. Rather, it was originally a bill to remove the fee-setting process from the legislature and statutes, where it has historically resided. Representatives of all the affected businesses opposed such a move.

You will likely hear in testimony from the county health departments, that these inspection fees have not been increased for six years. That it true, as the last time a fee bill was passed it was agreed by all parties that with the large increase at that time, the fees would remain constant for five years. For the past two years, I have asked on several occasions when we would be beginning the discovery process. No dates or discussions were ever set.

After several meetings here at the legislature, following the introduction of the original HB1226 bill, the House sponsor realized that there had been no prior stakeholder input or knowledge of the bill.

A coalition of representatives of the businesses who actually pay the fees put together a plan for a stakeholder process going forward that would again be held BEFORE the legislative session, and give time for research, study of inspection procedures, and negotiations by all parties. The House sponsor agreed that such a process was needed, so it became a "strike below" amendment and is the bill you see before you. The county health agencies have agreed that having this process in statute will provide a formal structure for discussing various aspects of the inspection programs, and help avoid long lags in fee discussions. We believe that passing this bill should help improve communications for all parties in the future.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with questions or suggestions.

Appreciatively,

Mary Lou

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