

OFFICE OF POLICY AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

To: Members, Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
From: Karen S. Nadeau, Legislative Analyst
Date: March 9, 2021
Subj: **LD 322** An Act To Provide Occupants of Motor Vehicles with Gold Star Family Registration Plates Free Entry to State Parks and Historic Sites

This bill provides for free entry to state parks and historic sites managed by the State for those individuals who have gold star family registration plates on their motor vehicles and for passengers in those vehicles.

TESTIMONY

Proponents: *None other than the sponsor*

Written testimony only: Natural Resources Council of Maine

- A Gold Star Family is the immediate family member of a fallen service member who died while serving on active duty.
- We can honor and reward our veterans and recognize the sacrifices of Gold Star families by providing them the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of Maine's state parks and historic sites at no cost to them; vehicles displaying a disabled veteran license plate currently receive this benefit.

Opponents: *None*

NFNA: *Bureau of Parks and Lands*

- We recognize the good intentions behind LD 322 and are also compelled to note the fiscal impact. There are approximately 360 Gold Star families in Maine – based on vehicle season pass for \$105, the maximum fiscal impact would be approximately \$38,000.

RELATED FEDERAL ACTIVITY

- **January 1, 2021** - Legislation sponsored by U.S. Senator Angus King and Congressman Jared Golden to make national parks free for Gold Star Families was enacted into law after Congress voted to override the President's veto of the National Defense Authorization Act.
- **October 2020** - The Secretary of the Interior issued an order to provide free access to National parks and other federal lands for veterans and Gold Star Families beginning October 28, 2020.

RECENT LEGISLATION

128th Legislature – LD 1127, AA To Provide Occupants of Motor Vehicles with Gold Star Family Registration Plates Free Entry to State Parks

- ACF Committee voted unanimously OTPA (fiscal note only amendment).
- LD 1127 died on the Appropriations Table.
- Estimated revenue loss to GF of \$10,575 per fiscal year (based on 188 active Gold Star registration plates in 2017).

129th Legislature – LD 169, AA To Provide Occupants of Motor Vehicles with Gold Star Family Registration Plates Free Entry to State Parks, Camping Areas and Beaches

- ACF Committee voted unanimously OTPA.
- LD 169 died on the Appropriations Table upon conclusion of the 129th Legislation (adjourned in March 17, 2020 and did not reconvene).
- Estimated General Fund revenue loss of \$8,786 per fiscal year (based on 185 active Gold Star registration plates in 2019).

PRELIMINARY FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT: *Fiscal note required.*

Estimated to reduce GF revenue by \$10,327 annually using the assumptions listed below:

Total active Gold Star license plates	218 cars
29% already buy annual park passes	63 annual passes
63 passes not sold @ \$105 each	\$6,615 revenue lost from passes not sold
71% don not buy annual passes	155 cars
155 cars make 1.5 park visits each year	232 car visits
4 people in car each visit	928 day trips
Average of \$4 per adult visit	<u>\$3,712 revenue loss from day trips not sold</u>
Total	\$10, 327

Title 29-A

§524-B. Gold star family registration plates

1. Eligibility. Notwithstanding the requirements in section 468-A, the Secretary of State, upon application and upon evidence of payment of the excise tax required by Title 36, section 1482, shall issue a registration certificate and a set of gold star family registration plates, to be used in lieu of regular registration plates, to:

A. A person who is eligible to receive a gold star lapel button under 10 United States Code, Section 1126 (2010);

B. A grandparent of a member of the United States Armed Forces, if that member dies after March 28, 1973 as a result of:

- (1) An international terrorist attack against the United States or a foreign nation friendly to the United States, recognized as such an attack by the United States Secretary of Defense; or
- (2) Military operations while serving outside the United States, including the commonwealths, territories and possessions of the United States, as a part of a peacekeeping force;

C. A person who is not eligible to receive a gold star lapel button under 10 United States Code, Section 1126 (2010) but who is eligible for a lapel button for next of kin of deceased personnel under 32 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 578.63 (2006); and

D. A grandparent of a member of the United States Armed Forces, if that member dies while serving on active duty or while assigned in the reserve components of the United States Armed Forces or Army National Guard unit in a drill status.