

Dane Courtois
Hiram
LD 829

Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

As a steadfast supporter of the Second Amendment and a proud resident of Maine, I write to strongly endorse LD 829, which would standardize laws to allow the carrying of concealed handguns in our state parks. This bill upholds the rights of law-abiding Mainers, aligns with our state's constitutional carry framework, and enhances safety in the wild and beautiful places we cherish.

Maine's state parks—like Baxter, Acadia, and Camden Hills—are treasures that draw families, hikers, and adventurers from Kittery to Fort Kent. But they're also remote, sprawling areas where help can be miles away. A hiker in the Allagash Wilderness or a camper at Sebago Lake might face wildlife threats—bear encounters have risen in recent years—or, worse, human predators. Our state's constitutional carry law, enacted in 2015, already trusts Mainers 21 and older to carry concealed in most public spaces without a permit. LD 829 simply extends that same trust to our state parks, eliminating inconsistent rules that confuse law-abiding citizens and leave them defenseless in places where self-reliance is paramount.

The Second Amendment doesn't stop at a park boundary, nor should Maine's laws. Right now, uneven regulations across state parks create a patchwork that frustrates gun owners and undermines equal protection. A concealed carrier legal on a sidewalk in Bangor shouldn't become a lawbreaker by stepping into nearby Bradbury Mountain State Park. LD 829 brings clarity and fairness, ensuring that Mainers exercising their constitutional rights face no arbitrary barriers. This isn't about expanding gun ownership—it's about respecting the rights we already have, consistently applied. Beyond liberty, this bill bolsters safety. An armed populace deters crime, a principle proven across Maine and beyond. Our state parks, while serene, aren't immune to incidents—assaults, thefts, and missing persons cases occur annually. In 2023 alone, Maine wardens responded to dozens of emergencies in these areas, often arriving long after the crisis began. A concealed handgun in the hands of a responsible adult—say, a parent at Popham Beach or a backpacker in Grafton Notch—can stop a threat before it escalates, protecting not just the carrier but others around them. States like Vermont and New Hampshire, with permissive carry laws in their parks, report no surge in violence; instead, their citizens enjoy peace of mind knowing they're equipped to respond.

Critics might raise fears of “wild west” scenarios, but Maine's track record proves otherwise. Since constitutional carry passed, our concealed carriers have shown exemplary restraint, with violent crime remaining among the lowest in the nation. Our hunters, shooters, and outdoorsmen—many of whom frequent state parks—already handle firearms responsibly. LD 829 doesn't flood parks with guns; it ensures those already carrying can do so without confusion or penalty.

I urge the Judiciary Committee to support LD 829. This bill honors Maine's heritage of freedom, trusts our people, and strengthens safety in our state parks. Let's send a clear message: the right to self-defense belongs wherever Mainers roam—be it a city street or a forest trail. Thank you for your time and dedication to our state.

Sincerely,
Dane Courtois