

## Veterans Park Pass to include Families

- Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. I am Jennie Titcomb, I proposed this idea to Representative Hepler in support of my husband Chuck (an Iraq War veteran) and all other Maine veterans and their families. I support **LD 56, An Act to Provide Free Admission to State Parks and Historic Sites for the Spouses and Children of Veterans Holding Free Day Use Passes.**
- Firstly, we wanted to say that we appreciate the fact that the state has provided veterans with this benefit. We also want to thank Representative Hepler for presenting the bill and the Senators and Representatives for cosponsoring.
- Individual passes cost \$55. Currently, we purchase this pass and pay the additional \$1 for our daughter. Once she turns 12 years old, two individual passes would total \$110, making the \$105 car pass a better value. Once purchasing this, it effectively negates the veteran's pass, as that's irrelevant with a vehicle pass. At that point it is no longer a benefit.
- This example is our reality, and we are fortunate enough that there will be no issue paying the car pass price when the time comes. Our concern is for veterans and their families who cannot afford either pass, or who do not necessarily go often enough to warrant a season pass. A family of 4, with 2 kids 12 or older, would spend \$18 every time they go to Reid State Park (RSP) or Popham Beach State Park (PBSP). It would only make sense for them to pay per trip until their 6<sup>th</sup> beach trip, at which point it would have been a better value for them to have purchased the vehicle pass. For lower income veterans with families, this could quickly make it cost prohibitive to go to a park more than 1-2 times annually. There is likely a significant portion of the veteran population unable to use this benefit because of this.
- For example, when we go to RSP or PBSP, we present the Veteran's pass, Individual Season pass, and \$1. Almost every time this causes confusion for the park staff and we have to explain why we're giving them 3 different forms of payment. After researching for this, we found that the Active Duty and 100% Disabled Veteran passes both grant day use, which covers families as well as the veteran. Likely the park staff are assuming we're part of one of those categories and are therefore confused when we try to pay.
- We believe this needs to be amended to better align the three categories of servicemembers/veterans in a more equitable way. If all three classifications of veterans have similar benefit in regards to day use of parks, it would ease the financial burden on veterans and their families. It would also make administration easier and would ease the burden for park staff, helping with expediting park entry for those parks that are busier.
- We strongly believe the three classifications of Veterans should have the same benefit, and also allow the families to use the pass even in the veteran's absence. In our case, we utilize Reid State Park very frequently. Quite often, our daughter and I go while Chuck is at work. If this benefit isn't allowed to be used by the families, then families like ours will still have no choice but to purchase passes to the parks or pay the full price each time we want to go without the veteran— making the Veteran's pass irrelevant at a certain point. For other veterans, this could be the difference between them using the parks or not.
- Thank you again for your time and support.