



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: (207) 287-4469

Allison Hepler

417 Montsweag Rd.
Woolwich, ME 04579
Phone: (207) 319-4396

Allison.Hepler@legislature.maine.gov

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Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler presenting

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 *Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry*

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and colleagues of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. As you know, I am Allison Hepler, and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath, and Woolwich. I am pleased to present **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.**

I'm honored to represent the two most beautiful state parks in Maine, Reid State Park in Georgetown, and Popham Beach State Park in Phippsburg. It's also an honor to represent many veterans and their families.

Current law provides free admission to Maine resident veterans holding a lifetime park pass to state parks and historic sites. This bill would extend free admission to immediate family members in the presence of the veterans. In fact, I offer a friendly amendment to this bill, changing "spouses and children" to "immediate family members," defining "immediate family" to mean a "person's spouse or domestic partner and dependent children."

Veterans make up nearly 10% of Maine population, the fifth highest percentage in the nation. Out of the 105,385 veterans, nearly half are considered from the Vietnam Era, while 15,450 have served since September 11, 2001.

And now for a bit of history, and a shout out to our Law and Legislative Library: Since 2004, Maine veterans have been granted free admission to state parks, and for many years their families were too. In 2009, the bill that allowed this to happen reached its sunset clause and has yet to be successfully reintroduced.

When a person serves in the military, so does the family. I first learned of this in the 1990s when I read Sarah Smiley's regular column in Maine newspapers about life as a military wife with young children. I

was reminded of this reality again when I spoke with a family last summer. That conversation prompted this bill.

I believe that the department has information on the possible fiscal impact of this bill. I was unable to find the fiscal information when the current law was enacted in 2009.

In conclusion, Reid and Popham are heavily used by local residents and I imagine that this is no different from others across the state. Veterans and their families are an important part of our communities and I believe that this small token of the state's acknowledgement of their service is both reasonable and timely.

Thank you for your time and I hope to be able to answer any questions you have.