



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep Ann Matlack, introducing

LD 1685, An Act to Increase Acreage Eligibility and Change Requirements for Filing Plans Under the Maine Tree Growth Tax Law

Before the Taxation Committee

Good morning, Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry and respected colleagues on the Taxation Committee. My name is Ann Matlack and I represent House District 43, which includes the communities of Cushing, Thomaston, South Thomaston, St George and part of Owls Head. I am here today to present LD 1685, An Act to Increase Acreage Eligibility and Change Requirements for Filing Plans Under the Maine Tree Growth Tax Law.

I regret that Kerry Leichtman, the assessor for Rockport Camden and Rockland, cannot be here today. He was instrumental in bringing this issue to my attention; but, he had a personal matter to attend to and is unable to participate in this Public Hearing. Mr Leichtman kindly arranged for several knowledgeable individuals to attend, so that your more technical questions may be answered. He has also submitted detailed testimony.

LD 1685 would do 2 things. First, it would increase the minimum acreage for admittance into the program from 10 acres to 25 acres. While the Tree Growth program is intended to encourage the planned growth and harvesting of trees, many foresters are reluctant to harvest on smaller lots because it is not worth their efforts to do so. To accommodate those properties that would no longer qualify for the Tree Growth Program, this bill includes an exit plan for owners of smaller lots. These lots would also probably be eligible for admission into the Open Space current use program.

Second, it would allow assessors to keep a copy of Forest Management and Harvest Plans on file. Assessors administer the Tree Growth Program and are tasked with enforcing compliance. However, they are not allowed to retain copies of the Plans; the Plans must be returned to the owner or shredded. These Plans cover a 10-year period. It is not reasonable to think that someone would retain knowledge of a complicated work plan for that length of time, not to mention that the original assessor may no longer be in that position.

The Maine Tree Growth program is important to the Maine forest products industry. Making these changes to the law will streamline administration, making it less time-consuming and less onerous to enforce.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.