



Stacy Brenner
Senator, District 30

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Stacy Brenner in introducing LD 2230, "*An Act to Change DHHS's Rules Regarding Youth Camps to Major Substantive Rules*"
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 5, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Stacy Brenner. I represent Senate District 30, which includes all of Gorham and most of Scarborough. I am pleased to introduce LD 2230, "*An Act to Change DHHS's Rules Regarding Youth Camps to Major Substantive Rules.*"

My husband and I run Broadturn Farm in Scarborough, ME. We've farmed dairy, beef, poultry eggs, goats, and lambs for profit. Currently, we grow organic produce, with our primary crop being cut flowers. Notably, for 20 years we also ran a summer day camp at our farm. So I came to the discussion about making the rule regarding youth camps – Rule 208 – a major substantive rule as someone who was familiar with youth camp regulations. For 9 weeks each summer we welcomed 40 children per week.

During the time that we ran the summer day camp, our relationship with the Health Inspection Program at DHHS was as cool as it could be. This was in part of the long standing collaboration that has existed between Maine youth camps and DHHS staff. My understanding is that some of the first regulations ever promulgated in our country governing the operation of youth camps started right here in Maine. Those regulations were the product of discussions between the Maine Youth Camp Association and DHHS staff and formed the basis of rules that have been replicated by many states across our nation.

Recently, I've heard from several constituents who are camp directors, Members of the Maine Youth Camp Association or who are involved in running youth camps about the recent draft of Rule 208. Many of you have probably received similar concerns with your own constituents. As someone who ran a summer day camp on a farm, I can tell you from experience that the proposed regulatory structure of "farm camping" in Rule 208 will create confusion with existing rules governing the operation of Maine farms. Many of the critical regulations in that new section are already governed by the state or federal agencies. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, along with local cooperative extensions, the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association and others outline agricultural best practices that farmers follow to ensure our land, plants, livestock, farmers, and consumers are treated to the highest standard of quality and protect the health and safety of all Mainers.



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Another concern I have of the proposed Rule 208 is the mandatory fingerprinting as proposed in Section 9. Camps are already required to conduct a background check on all employees. The fingerprinting check would hinder the ability of summer camps to recruit and retain employees as many of camps in Maine rely on International college students and many individuals who may serve as volunteers. The cost to obtain fingerprints and the time it takes to receive such information would discourage many camps from functioning altogether.

My motivation for this bill is what appears to be a breakdown in an otherwise productive relationship between DHHS and the youth camps. I am hopeful that this can be rejuvenated. Making Rule 208 major substantive would give the Legislature direct input in the rulemaking process, but I am mindful that doing so would add more work to the already significant workload of this Committee.

As an alternative, a good first step would be ensuring that DHHS and the Maine Youth Camp Association have an opportunity for an open discussion that permits an unrestricted exchange of information regarding all the subject matter changes included in Rule 208. This should happen prior to any revision of the current proposed rule.

Maine Youth Camps make a significant contribution to their communities and to our economy every summer. They should not be regulated like schools, child-care centers, hotels or restaurants. My hope is that this legislation will lead to a thoughtful collaborative process.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this bill to you. I'd be happy to answer any questions.