



Testimony of Lucy J. Norvell,
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Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In Support of LD 2230, An Act to Change Department of Health and Human Services
Rules Regarding Youth Camps to Major Substantive Rules

Sponsored by Senator Stacy Brenner

March 5, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, Good Afternoon! My name is Lucy Norvell and my home is in Scarborough, ME. I am the Executive Director of Maine Summer Camps, known as MSC, a nonprofit organization. We are two, sibling nonprofit organizations: the Maine Youth Camping Foundation (MYCF), which does business as Maine Summer Camps and the Maine Youth Camp Association (MYCA). Our mission is to support and promote meaningful developmental, educational, environmental, and recreational experiences for children. For a youth camp experience to be meaningful in all these important ways, it also must be safe. Using our online presence, publications, trainings, and conferences, we enhance the public's understanding of the value of Maine camps. We also support camp and business members by offering in-person and virtual educational and networking opportunities; a broad range of resource information, in print, electronically, and online; and carefully curated news and updates.

I understand and support the purpose of today's public hearing. Rather than focusing on aspects of the proposed 208 rule, I would like to take a few minutes to focus on the overall impact the summer camp experience has on a child and the broader work that youth camps engage in. This "heart & soul component" is often lost in our conversations during the regulatory process. Our organization feels the following comments are an important addition to the public record:

The IMPACT of the work of summer camp professionals is significant and transformational for the people involved. Serving as a summer camp professional requires multiple skill sets, deep knowledge, dedication and downright grit, and the ability to meet the needs of today's youth. Some of the first summer camps in the nation were established in Maine well over a



century ago. Educators founded us – the concept of summer camp. They knew that the educational environment they created was exceptional and they acknowledged that their students came from families that were doing a wonderful job of raising their children, but something was missing. What did the educators ultimately determine was missing? “An outdoor group experience that fostered children’s sense of independence and abilities to live, work, and play together.” This discovery was the beginning of the summer camp movement. Maine has remained a leader in the Summer Camp Movement on a national stage. Just last month in New Orleans I accepted a Special Recognition Award for Maine Summer Camps Indigenous Neighbors Working Group at the American Camp Association’s national Conference. This committee of MSC has led other Maine camp pros in learning about and working to end cultural appropriation in camps. It is an enormous educational undertaking that involves collaboration on a state, regional and national level with an impact that is significant. Maine Summer Camps and the camps we serve most definitely continue to IMPACT our field on a state, regional, and national level.

Speaking of the national ACA, their accreditation standards, which are considered THE Standards for our field, were based on Maine’s first camp regulation. You see, our organization and the state of Maine go back to the time when we sat down together to craft the very first camp regulations in the nation. As those regulations have evolved over time, they are now called our 208 Rule. MSC has always been invited to the table when they have been revised.

Summer camps in Maine have a significant IMPACT on Maine – its people and its economy. We employ 13,000 staff members in seasonal jobs and serve upwards of 65,000 children. Summer Camp is considered a heritage industry – like lobstering and logging and our economic influence has an estimated impact just shy of \$500M. Our collective impact on workforce development is enormous. Summer camp jobs make the best first job a person can have with all the training that is provided. We are a launch pad for many of Maine’s Outdoor economy jobs. Skills built over summers as a staff person are highly valued in camp adjacent work – whether that is guiding a rafting trip down rapids or knowing what kind of outfitting an L.L. Bean shopper needs for an upcoming fishing or camping trip.

Thousands of people receive First Aid and CPR and lifeguarding certifications at summer camp. This comes in handy in other jobs and in the community during non-camp months. This is just one small example of the impact of camp employment. Summer camps exist for the campers, but camp staff also learn and benefit from the work itself. They also end the summer with multiple certifications that come as part of the staff training. Summer camps in Maine make a difference and have a huge, positive IMPACT as employers.



The IMPACT of summer camp experiences on children’s development and their futures is life-changing! Here are the highlights. Earlier I referred to camp professionals’ ability to meet youth where they are and to respond to their current needs. For more than a century we have a history of doing this at tremendously vulnerable times for the nation – during WWII, after 9/11, and during a global pandemic. Right now, children are struggling. Many of them are struggling mightily with mental health challenges. Child development and other experts have been clear about what children need. Here is what we know for sure: Summer Camp provides what children need.

The US Surgeon General warns of the devastating impact of the epidemic of loneliness and isolation. Summer camp, with many opportunities to interact with peers and adults carefully chosen to work with campers, is the answer.

The National Academy of Pediatrics and other experts warn of the critical need for children to experience nature and the out of doors. Pediatricians are writing prescriptions for their patients to go outside and play – to visit parks even. Summer camp, where children typically spend far more time outside and where they can learn how to care for Maine’s spectacular landscape, is the answer.

Too many experts to list agree that digital devices are causing irreparable damage to children’s mental health. Summer camps, where children are unplugged, is the answer.

All these examples, and there are many more, harken back to the beginning of the camp movement when educators noticed that what was missing was an “outdoor group experience.”

Today the need for summer camp holds constant – and we have experts with research to back that up. Research proves that summer camp experiences stem summer learning loss. Many of the informal activities of summer camp support formal academic learning. I toured around Maine last summer, visiting thirty summer camps. I either saw a small library or witnessed staff and/or campers reading at every single one. A decade or so ago you might have heard mention of the “soft skills” that summer camp experiences helped build. I am here to tell you today that these are rock-hard competencies that summer camp experiences help build in campers and in staff.

These are the very same competencies that employers are looking for: 21st century skills such as communication and collaboration, problem solving skills, and resilience. Campers gain these skills and many more, including the progressive skill development that camps are



famous for – from swimming lessons to those skills specific to sports and the arts (fine, performing and crafts), and all muscle-powered outdoor pursuits. In our beloved Maine, there's more of Maine, and more to Maine, than the rest of New England combined: deeper forests, bigger lakes and longer rivers, more rugged mountains, and more than 3,500 miles of coastline. Summer camps help campers develop the skills to adventure and explore in our own back yard on watercraft like canoes, kayaks, and sailboats, on bicycle, and on foot as hikers. Baked into the many lessons necessary to engage in these muscle-powered pursuits are also lessons of environmental sustainability and a love of Maine. Summer camps send campers home knowing how to do many things safely. Summer camps send campers home knowing much more about how to live in community and how to be a respectful, contributing community member. Summer camps send campers and staff home walking a little taller, empowered by their summer experiences and adventures, knowing more about themselves and what they bring to a group.

The IMPACT of summer camp experiences here in Maine is significant for children, for camp staff, and for the state of Maine. Our professionals are responsible for changing the world, one camper at a time, one camp season at a time. I am proud to serve them and to do whatever I can in my role to support their essential contributions. Through 145 summer camps in Maine, we at MSC support and promote meaningful developmental, educational, environmental, and recreational experiences for children.