

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND
WILDLIFE**

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 76

“An Act to Allow Use of the Fish Hatchery Maintenance Fund to Compensate Hatchery Staff When Certain Operational Needs Require Overtime”

SPONSORED BY: Representative Thorne of Carmel

DATE OF HEARING: February 3, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Liz Latti, Fisheries and Hatcheries Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of **L.D. 76**.

This bill was brought forth by the department and seeks to expand utilization of the Fish Hatchery Maintenance Fund (Title 12, section 10252) to allow for overtime compensation of hatchery staff when certain operational needs require overtime. This would align with other dedicated funds in other bureaus within the agency that are used to fund overtime pay.

The Fish Hatchery Maintenance Fund receives 50% of the proceeds from license plate renewals of “The Maine Sportsmen Plate” and is used for funding engineering designs, assessment of facilities, repair, and capital improvements.

The Department’s hatchery staff annually grow and stock over one million fish in Maine’s waters, contributing to over 300 million in annual revenue to our economy from fishing. The hatchery employee’s responsibilities are important for the Department’s fisheries management as well as the economy, and many tasks require extended workdays to maintain current production and public expectations.

Certain hatchery operations once commenced must be completed. These operations include stocking by airplane and backpack, spawning operations, and on-station emergencies, which all result in unavoidable extended workdays. Currently there is no

reasonable planning for these operations that would allow overtime-eligible staff to work a standard workday.

Other operations, as a result of the State's large geographical size, have hatchery staff coordinating stocking events for clustered waters to be completed in one trip. These planned stocking events can result in extended workdays but ultimately minimize multiple day trips, overall staff time, fuel consumption, and increase productivity during peak spawning and stocking season.

Currently the Division has no designated funding source for overtime pay for expected overtime hatchery operations other than state general funds designated for personal services in the fisheries and hatcheries budget. If the Division is fully staffed throughout the fiscal year, there would be little or no ability (through salary savings) to have any funding to pay for overtime. For this reason, compensation for extended workdays would be provided with compensating time off. When pay is available the Union contract requires payment when overtime is necessary unless compensatory time is mutually agreed upon.

This initiative seeks to meet the required payment for overtime eligible hatchery staff for operationally required responsibilities through utilization of the Fish Hatchery Maintenance Fund, creating a secure funding source for annual operational needs.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.