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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY  
IN SUPPORT OF LD 121

*An Act to Include Brush and Yard Debris in the Definition of "Litter"*

February 3, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Robby Gross, and I am the Chief Forest Ranger of the Maine Forest Service (MFS). I am testifying on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) in support of LD 121, "*An Act to Include Brush and Yard Debris in the Definition of 'Litter.'*"

MFS is one agency responsible for enforcing Maine's litter laws. Over the past three years, Maine Forest Rangers have responded to approximately 200 litter and dumping complaints annually. These complaints vary in nature and involve a variety of practices. At best, these are a nuisance to landowners; at worst, they are costly in remediation or removal of deposited materials. Additionally, landowners may restrict access to their property as a result of illegal dumping or littering.

LD 121 proposes adding brush and yard debris to the definition of litter. We support this intent so long as it is narrowly enforced and not applied to minor incidents, such as leaves accidentally blowing from an open truck bed. This change has the potential to strengthen protection for private landowners who permit public access and enables Rangers to help them address unauthorized dumping of materials on their property, which can include invasive vegetation.

This proposal can help to clarify current law and add more tools for resolving complaints, whether through the issuance of a summons or working with the person responsible for cleaning up the property that was illegally dumped on. Dumping brush and yard debris on others' property increases the risk of wildfire spread as a result of the build-up of fuels, increases the risk of spreading invasive insects and disease through woody materials, and encourages others to dump more brush and debris in areas once a practice is established.

MFS encourages landowners to manage their brush and yard debris responsibly. This debris can be chipped on site, burned with an open burn permit, or transported to an approved area such as a municipal landfill or approved brush drop-off area. These best practices encourage wildfire preparedness strategies and the control of invasive insects and diseases, ultimately protecting Maine's natural resources.

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

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