

To: The Honorable Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee

From: Kevin Antonovitch, Solon, Maine

Date: February 12, 2025

RE: Opposition to LD 205, An Act to Amend the Bag limit for Turkey

By way of background, I have been an outdoor enthusiast, conservationist and avid hunter for over four decades. About half way through my hunting career, I was introduced to Turkey Hunting by a friend. That first skeptical introduction to the sport of Turkey Hunting has turned into a passion which has become a strong part of my life. I am a Silver Life Sponsor member of the National Wild Turkey Federation, a Maine Certified Hunter Education Instructor, a member of the Skowhegan Sportsmans Club and I have mentored many young and new hunters through lecture, instruction and mentored hunts.

I believe that by allowing LD 205 to move forward, would be detrimental to our current wild turkey population, hunting opportunities and would further erode our hunting heritage which is so entangled in our Maine way of life.

There are many reasons why LD 205 should not move forward. But I would like to bring a few important reasons to your attention during the short time I have to speak.

LD 205, as proposed, does not address the sex of the birds harvested or during which season those birds could be harvested. Wild turkeys breed and have their young in the spring of the year as do ruffed grouse. However, Ruffed grouse are hunted only in the fall after they have raised their young. Wild turkeys travel in flocks, ruffed grouse do not. There are currently two Wild Turkey seasons; a Spring and Fall season. Only males or "toms" are allowed to be harvested during the Spring season because the females or "hens" have been bred and are nesting. If LD 205 were moved forward, it would allow four (4) either sex turkeys to be taken daily with up to eight (8) in possession during the spring hunt which currently only allows the harvesting of two (2) bearded birds. The harvesting of hens during the spring season would have an incredible impact on the current and future population of wild turkeys.

Turkey hunting, for those who have not participated in the sport, is addictive, exciting and interactive. Those three qualities make it very easy to introduce youth or new hunters to the sport of hunting. Turkey hunting takes place typically in the spring or early fall when it is an enjoyable and beautiful time to be outdoors. Maine's turkey seasons are some of the longest and allow ample opportunity. Those qualities of turkey hunting make it instrumental in maintaining and fostering our hunting heritage. If LD 205 were moved forward, it would have a detrimental impact on our current turkey population and eventually impact how we introduce, retain, and bring back hunters whose numbers are nationally on the decline. Introducing new

hunters to turkey hunting could spark them to try other methods and species to hunt which in turn could bring revenue to the State.

It seems like LD 205 is a knee jerk reaction to what seems like, to some, as an overabundance of turkeys or nuisance turkeys on the landscape. There are currently methods used by IF&W to address those situations which are based on science and not passion. Those practices should be allowed to monitor and control those incidents. Currently, nuisance or overpopulation of turkeys are controlled by depredation permits issued by IF&W or by trap and transport programs which deal with those incidents.

I would like to suggest another solution to the over abundance problem, which would be beneficial to both the hunter and those experiencing problems with wild turkeys. A website could be developed through IF&W where individuals who want to hunt turkeys could get in contact with those farmers or individuals with an overabundance or nuisance wild turkey problem. In combination with the depredation permits, hunters could enjoy the hunt and harvest the birds. There are methods already in place or could be adopted to address nuisance or overpopulation of wild turkeys in specific areas. These methods should be utilized instead of negatively impacting the wild turkey population and its presence on the landscape.

By changing the bag limits on Wild Turkeys to reflect those limits on Ruffed Grouse there would be a significant negative impact on the Wild Turkey population and our hunting heritage. There are already means in place to deal with nuisance or over populations of Wild Turkeys and those programs should be allowed to remain and control those problems. The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife was given the authority by the legislature to monitor and control the Wild Turkey population and other species through various seasons and bag limits that are scientifically based. IF&W should be allowed to continue that mission.

Thank you for considering my testimony in opposition to LD 205 for the reasons I have stated.

Respectfully submitted,

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