

Chairman Senator Rachel Talbot Ross, Representative Bill Pluerker, and members to the ACF committee

My name is Gregory Foster. I am a resident of the town of Raymond, a forest property owner and a consulting forester offering forest management services to non-industrial private forest landowners in southern Maine. I have practiced forestry in Maine for 45 years, including time as a state forester in the 1980's.

Recently, Maine Forest Service Director Patty Cormier brought to my attention LD 417, An Act Regarding the Confidentiality of Certain Records Belonging to the Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Among other things, she raised her concern about how it could affect Foresters and Forest Landowners, including the ability of the Maine Forest Service to announce meetings and workshops, to pursuing legal problems like timber trespass or timber theft.

Three former MFS enforcement foresters, of whom I know very well, have shared in the past how MFS handles investigations of potential violations. Their first step is to work with clients to keep them from creating violations to begin with. The next level of enforcement is to work with the clients to resolve any issues that may get out of hand. These foresters did everything they could to prevent the last resort of enforcement.

One enforcement forester learned of a MFS forest ranger being very overzealous investigating a forest landowner. He intervened, and redirected the investigation in a more appropriate manner. It seems to me these approach's to enforcement are most appropriate, and fail to see how this bill improves anything about the functioning of the MFS.

My testimony is more about the integrity of the MFS. I am fortunate that I have not been on the receiving end of an investigation, and do not have an actual example of how this law change could negatively affect the function of the MFS pursuing or preventing violations. I have known Patty Cormier my whole career, and believe she has a very good understanding of Maine's forest community. I have faith that her opinion about this bill is in the best interest of our forest community.

I believe LD 417 ought not to pass.

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