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Testimony of Representative Nina Milliken presenting
LD 716, An Act to Restrict the Hunting of Coyotes
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and friends and colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. My name is Nina Milliken and it is my honor to represent the good folks of the towns of Blue Hill, Brooksville, Castine, Sedgwick, Surry and Trenton in the Maine House. Today I am here to present my bill, **LD 716, An Act to Restrict the Hunting of Coyotes**.

This bill has generated quite a buzz. I don't think I have ever received more hateful phone calls, emails and texts about any bill I have presented before. People seem to have strong opinions about the hunting of coyotes. I have learned a lot and I anticipate that I will learn a lot more over the course of the hearing today. I want to spend a minute before launching into the bill addressing what I find to be a sad issue impacting all of us, the members of the legislature. The hateful rhetoric that we are all being subjected to is deeply troubling to me. Not just about this bill, but about so much of our work. I hope that all of you are receiving more kindness than negativity during these deeply politically contentious times. I appreciate all of you and the work that you are doing for your constituents.

Currently, there are no limitations on coyote hunting in Maine, except that you cannot hunt them on Sunday and you cannot hunt them during the day during deer season. You can kill coyotes in any way you want and I have heard from many folks that it can be quite gruesome. You don't have to report having killed them, either, which leaves us having little understanding of how many are being killed statewide.

This bill would limit the time that you could hunt coyotes to only between October first and March 31st. This would allow the coyotes to not be hunted during the time that they are breeding and nursing their young. Additionally, I asked your analyst to draft an amendment to remove the exception for coyotes from wanton waste.

There are a number of people that will surely testify after me about the benefits that coyotes bring to our state and they are more qualified than I am to speak on this subject, but I would like to highlight some things that will likely come up that I personally find quite important. Coyotes kill deer. We do not have a shortage of deer anywhere in this state except way up north, where, as I understand it, deer don't naturally spend their time. Deer carry many, many thousands of ticks and those ticks carry diseases that are having harmful impacts on people in this state. I have three children. Two of my three children have been diagnosed with Lyme Disease. It is a potentially debilitating disease and I am sure that you are all well aware of the harm that Lyme, as well as other tick borne diseases can bring to people. And if you are not aware, you have the legislature's tick expert on your committee. Allowing for the coyote population to expand would allow a natural trimming back of our deer population, which would likely limit the tick population. That, in turn, would cut back the Lyme problem in Maine.

People will likely testify that coyotes are an invasive species in Maine. A December 30, 2024 post on the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife Facebook page stated, "Coyotes were not introduced to Maine. Coyotes are not invasive. Coyotes are a naturalized species that expanded their range through natural dispersal, just like opossums." Many vegetable farmers support limiting coyote hunting. They, like me, are not happy to have the huge number of deer eating our vegetables. Additionally, many livestock farmers have expressed their support of limiting these hunts. Dogs are successful at keeping coyotes at bay. Tooty, my pup who runs and plays freely has made it that I have never once seen a coyote on my property in Blue Hill, despite the delicious chickens clucking around our yard.

There are many reasons to support this bill, or some version of the bill, to limit the hunting of coyotes. At a minimum, I believe that it is prudent to pass the amendment. Predators are a vital and necessary part of any ecosystem. Limits on killing those predators feels logical. To quote the website for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, "It's common sense that predators thrive when prey is abundant, but often overlooked is the positive impact of predation on prey populations. Healthy prey populations are generally not threatened by predation. You read that right. Through the lens of population ecology, prey benefits from predation. In a single interaction, an individual predator wins a meal while the life of its prey is lost, but from the population vantage point, the compilation of all interactions between those species results in healthy and resilient populations of both predator and prey."

I ask that you vote to pass LD 716. I genuinely appreciate your time and consideration and will happily try to answer any questions that the committee might have, however there are folks speaking after me who will be more qualified to answer many questions than I am. Thanks.