

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 777**

“An Act to Standardize the Muzzle-loading Season Statewide”

Presented by: Representative MASON of Lisbon.

DATE OF HEARING: Monday, March 10, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Tim Peabody, Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 777**.

This bill establishes that the muzzleloading season for deer must be the same in all areas of the State. The current statute allows for greater flexibility setting different muzzleloader season lengths in different parts of the state, which has been used to set shorter seasons in the areas of the state that are more impacted by severe winter conditions.

Deer in northern and western Maine exist near the limits of their North American range and are subject to severe winter conditions, which limit population growth potential. When winter conditions arrive, particularly deep snow, deer follow historic migration routes to their wintering areas, which may be natural deer wintering areas or in more recent times, around developed areas. When this snow arrives early, it is not uncommon for deer to be on these migration routes and headed to wintering areas while the hunting seasons are ongoing. As a result, hunters in these areas of the state often express concerns that deer are being hunted on migration routes or in wintering areas, that it is unethical to hunt deer in these conditions, and that an emergency season closure is needed. While in practice we have never closed the season early due to weather, we have seriously contemplated it and this bill would effectively lengthen the hunting season in northern, western, and Downeast Maine and likely result in more public concern and requests for early season closures. While statute would still allow the Commissioner to terminate the season in specific areas, when necessary, we do not believe it would be good practice to rely on emergency season closures to routinely set appropriate seasons, and doing so would result in significant public frustration.

If the Committee is supportive, an alternative option to this bill could be for the Department to use its existing rulemaking authority to potentially add a second week of muzzleloader season in a limited number of additional Wildlife Management Districts where winter conditions are less severe. This could provide some additional hunting opportunities, while continuing to allow the Department flexibility to adjust season length and timing in response to deer population status, weather conditions, and social factors. I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.