



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony In Support of LD 820 A Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish the Right to Hunt and Fish

March 12, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and distinguished members of the Inland Fisheries & Wildlife Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Caruso, and I represent House District 72 representing 9 towns and 20 townships and plantations of northern Somerset County. I am pleased to sponsor LD 820 Resolution: Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish the Right to Hunt and Fish.

There are currently 24 states in the country that have enshrined the right to hunt and fish in their constitution. The first state was Vermont in 1777. I have included a map of these for your reference. When I saw this map last fall, I thought, "Of all the states that should be protecting the right to hunt and fish, it's Maine!"

If your house is like mine, hunting and fishing is our way of life. It's the meat that fills our freezer and feeds our family all year long. For many Maine communities, it's also a pillar of our local hospitality and tourism economies.

For example, I live with my husband and sons at Pleasant Pond in Caratunk, a rural town known for its spectacular natural resources in the greater Forks Area along the Kennebec and Dead rivers. The four of us are all avid year-round outdoorsmen, and we are all Registered Maine Whitewater Guides. My husband's heart and his livelihood is being a Master Maine Guide. Greg was born and raised in Millinocket and spent as much time as humanly possible fishing and hunting with his grandfather, uncle and father. For Greg, one of the most meaningful aspects of fatherhood is that he has been able to share this love and knowledge with our sons.

Since 1992, my husband and I have worked as Maine guides. Starting in the 90s, I co-owned a whitewater turned year-round outdoor adventure company and started a bed and breakfast and outfitter shop that catered to the needs of guides and visitors of the Forks Area recreational tourism industry. I helped create and was the first executive director of the Forks Area Chamber of Commerce.

My husband's year-round livelihood is comprised of guiding anglers, hunters, snowmobilers, rafters, and hikers as the Appalachian Trail Kennebec River ferryman. Maine guides know that to make a living out of outdoor recreation, you have to do it all and a little bit of everything.

Likewise, our rural communities from Bingham to Jackman, and around to Moosehead – similar to any rural area across Maine that depends on outdoor tourism – piece together their seasonal hospitality economies to keep businesses open and families employed as much as possible throughout the year. This is not only true for Somerset County, but think of the western mountains, the County, and of course our extensive coastline towns dependent on the lobster and fishing industries.

Proudly Serving House District 72



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Hunters spend \$213M each year in Maine with \$102M on trip-related expenditures. Hunting supports nearly 4,000 Maine jobs and generates \$28M in state and local taxes. Boating and fishing collectively contributed \$412 million to Maine's GDP in 2022.

This amendment ensures that all are protected – our Maine way of life, food, sports, and jobs.

What else does this amendment do?

- Protects Maine against out-of-state special interest groups
- Continues jurisdiction of all current IF&W statutes
- Continues protections for wildlife conservation and management
- Continues all current landowner property rights and protections.
- Stipulates that hunting and fishing will be the preferred means of fish and wildlife management
- Preserves the future for Maine's hunting and fishing heritage
- Recognizes the right given to us by nature

Let it be clear what this bill is NOT....

- It does not allow for Sunday hunting.
- It does not alter IF&W rules and regulations or create a new governance structure.
- It does not challenge or weaken landowner rights.

Yes, some may say we already have the Right to Food. I say we can never have enough protection against people and big money from away trying to peel back our rights and access to the outdoors.

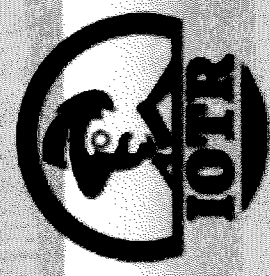
From York to Fort Kent, Rangely to Machias, very little unites Mainers as much as the rich tradition of hunting and fishing. From the rocking chair of your general store to the breakroom at work, hunting and fishing stories bring us together. This amendment is not only unifying and healing to our state, it is also good for Maine people, Maine's wildlife, and Maine's future.

On behalf of all the local communities, small business owners, and families who depend on hunting and fishing for their food and their livelihoods, and if you want to protect your childhood memories, family heritage, and the Maine hunting and fishing legacy that we leave our children, I ask you to vote ought to pass and let Maine voters cast their ballots.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth M. Caruso".

Elizabeth M. Caruso
State Representative



INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF
T. Roosevelt