



Maine Fire Chiefs' ASSOCIATION

Local Government Center 60 Community Drive Augusta, Maine 04330-9486

Senator Talbot Ross and Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

I am Chief Bill Gillespie from Liberty, serving as Fire Chief, Town Fire Warden, and Legislative Liaison for the Maine Fire Chiefs Association, representing over 400 Fire Chiefs statewide, and I am honored to be here today.

I am submitting this letter in opposition to LD 939, **An Act to Increase the Maximum Permissible Size of Recreational Campfires**, and I urge you to consider the potential consequences of this bill.

During the 131st Legislative session, the Maine Fire Chiefs supported LD 24, An Act to Prohibit Open Burning Under a Red Flag Warning and Regulate Recreational Campfires. This bill established a clear definition of a campfire, setting the size at 3 feet in diameter by 3 feet tall, and it has been a game-changer in our efforts to promote public safety.

By defining a campfire, we have been able to launch a coordinated public relations campaign to inform the public about the importance of campfire safety. Previously, there was no clear definition, and discretion varied by zone, leading to confusion and inconsistencies.

For instance, a campfire over 6 feet high and 8 feet wide was permissible if used for cooking, as long as it had rocks around it. However, there were no clear guidelines for Town Wardens, and this lack of clarity put our communities at risk.

In earlier legislation, we removed the \$7.00 fee for obtaining a burn permit to facilitate convenient burning, and it has been a huge success. Changing the campfire size at this time may lead to ongoing debates in future sessions, and I urge you to consider the long-term implications of this bill.

We have removed obstacles to enable people to enjoy campfires responsibly, and I believe that we should build on this progress rather than undermining it. I request that you require a burn permit for campfires exceeding the recommended size, as a common courtesy to our firefighters who put their lives on the line every day.

I am proud of our public awareness campaign, and I assure you that we are not measuring campfires to enforce compliance. Instead, we have taken this opportunity to educate the public positively, and it has been a truly uplifting experience.

I hope you will consider that firefighters' time is valuable, just like yours. We will be the ones responding to issues at all hours, and I urge you to think about the potential consequences of this bill on our communities.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your consideration of this matter.

Chief Bill Gillespie