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### *Testimony of Rep. Tiffany Roberts presenting*

## **LD 1322, Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Program to Enhance Youth Hunting Participation**

### *Before the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife*

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci and colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. I am Tiffany Roberts, and I represent House District 149, which includes parts of North and South Berwick. I am pleased to be here today to present **LD 1322, Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Program to Enhance Youth Hunting Participation**.

Maine has a proud hunting heritage rooted in conservation, self-reliance and outdoor tradition. But that legacy faces a serious challenge: a steady and measurable decline in youth hunting participation. This is more than a cultural loss. It poses real risks to our economic vitality, conservation funding and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Over the last decade, Maine, like many states, has seen a drop in hunting license purchases among young people. With fewer youth entering the pipeline, our long-term ability to sustain wildlife conservation through license revenue is threatened. Fewer young hunters also means fewer future mentors, fewer voices for habitat preservation and a disconnection from the outdoor heritage that has long defined life in Maine.

LD 1322 proposes a proactive, data-informed solution. By creating a structured two-year pilot program, the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, working in partnership with the Office of Tourism, can test targeted approaches to increasing youth involvement, collect meaningful data and scale what works.

This resolution emphasizes tracking results. It requires the department to report on participation data, demographic trends, stakeholder and community feedback, the impact on youth engagement, conservation awareness and recommendations for the program's modification, continuation or expansion.

This data will give us critical insight: What days and formats best support youth participation? What outreach methods drive the most interest? Which regions and communities are responding,

and which need additional support? In short, we won't just be guessing. We'll be learning, iterating, and building a more innovative, sustainable model for the future.

This program isn't just about participation. It's about partnerships. We're building an economic ecosystem around outdoor recreation by collaborating with community organizations, schools, local outfitters and outdoor retailers. Youth hunting weekends bring families to rural towns. They buy gear, stay in lodges, eat at restaurants and support local guides and sporting goods shops. As the program grows, these weekends could become seasonal events that boost local economies and keep money circulating within our communities.

Additionally, increased tourism visibility, with the Office of Tourism's involvement, opens doors for showcasing Maine as a premier destination for ethical, family-centered outdoor recreation. Beyond economics, this program is an investment in youth development. Hunting teaches patience, discipline and responsibility. It emphasizes respect for wildlife and natural systems. It provides a space for family bonding and mentorship, boosting self-confidence and outdoor safety. These are life skills, and this program ensures they are accessible to more young people, regardless of background or location. This effort becomes more than just hunting when paired with education and community events. It becomes a platform for lifelong outdoor engagement.

Another strength of LD 1322 is that it gives the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife the authority to adjust days and program components by rule, collaborate with diverse stakeholders, design marketing and outreach efforts and test innovative ideas without statutory overhaul. This flexibility is essential for a pilot program. It ensures the Department can adapt quickly to insights and feedback rather than being locked into rigid structures. It also enables them to invite conservation groups and hunting organizations to co-create program elements, fostering long-term buy-in.

Colleagues, LD 1322 is a timely, strategic and data-driven solution to a complex challenge. It empowers us to reignite youth interest in the outdoors, strengthen local economies and preserve the conservation funding model that relies on participation. I respectfully ask this committee to support LD 1322 and help lay the groundwork for a future in which Maine's hunting tradition is remembered and actively lived by generations to come.

Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions.