

## Testimony of Jason Burnham

In support of LD 1322, "Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Program to Enhance Youth Hunting Participation"

Committee of Inland Fisheries Wildlife

April 7, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee.

My name is Jason Burnham from Winthrop and I am speaking today in support of LD 1322.

LD 1322 is more than just a policy; it is a commitment to preserving our outdoor heritage, fostering conservation-minded youth, and ensuring that the next generation carries forward Maine's hunting and outdoors traditions.

As a father, Maine Guide, and youth outdoor educator, I've seen firsthand the impact that time in the outdoors has on children. My own kids have grown up exploring the Maine's woods, learning to read the land, track wildlife, and appreciate the natural world. Those experiences have not only shaped their understanding of the environment but have also instilled in them a deep sense of responsibility and connection to nature.

Richard Louv, in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, warns of a growing divide between children and the natural world—a phenomenon he calls "nature-deficit disorder." He argues that as screens replace streams and devices replace discovery, we risk raising a generation disconnected from the land, wildlife, and traditions that define us. The pilot program proposed in LD 1322 is a direct answer to that concern. By creating more opportunities for youth to experience hunting, we are not just teaching them how to harvest game; we are teaching them patience, resilience, and respect for the land—values that extend far beyond the woods.

Through expanded youth hunting days and a focused outreach effort, this initiative will help reintroduce children to the outdoors in a meaningful, hands-on way. It will connect them with mentors, with tradition, and with a lifestyle that promotes conservation, responsibility, and self-sufficiency.

I urge you to vote ought to pass—not just for the sake of hunting, but for the sake of our children's connection to the land. Because if we want them to grow into stewards of Maine's natural resources, we must first give them the opportunity to experience the land as generations before them have.

Thank you