

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

In Support of L.D. 1241

**“An Act to Establish the Make Change for Wildlife Program to Support the Maine
Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund”**

Presented by: Representative Cluchey of Bowdoinham.

CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator Carney of Cumberland and
Representatives: BRIDGEO of Augusta, DILL of Old Town, GRAMLICH of Old Orchard
Beach, SAYRE of Kennebunk, TERRY of Gorham, Senator: BALDACCI of Penobscot.

DATE OF HEARING: April 9, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of **L.D. 1241**.

This bill would repeal the Wildlife Enthusiast’s Conservation Appreciation, Recreation, and Enjoyment, or “WE CARE” support program and establish the Make Change for Wildlife Program as a way to generate voluntary contributions at point-of-sale businesses to benefit the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund. This bill also would allow participating businesses to deduct up to \$10,000 of their customer contributions for purposes of their corporate income tax beginning after January 1, 2026.

The Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund was established in 1983 and is a dedicated interest-bearing account that receives revenue from a variety of sources to support the conservation of Maine’s most at-risk species. Funds from this account are frequently used as state match to leverage additional federal conservation dollars, primarily through the State Wildlife Grants and Pittman-Robertson Fund programs to further impact conservation of these important species.

The two largest sources of income for this fund come from the voluntary charitable donations from the Chickadee Check-off program on personal income taxes and a portion of the sales of the Conservation Registration or “Loon Plate”. The fund also receives some voluntary contributions.

Through time, individual revenue sources have either plateaued or decreased. In 2024, the income into this account was limited to just over \$394,000 and voluntary contributions were

\$48,767, which was uniquely high. Over the last ten years voluntary contributions ranged roughly between \$2,220 and \$15,000.

The declining annual contributions to the Endangered and Nongame Wildlife fund, paired with annual inflation has handicapped the ability of the Fund to support projects on endangered, threatened, and at-risk wildlife. Yet, Maine's wildlife and biodiversity are facing numerous and growing threats. In short, the Fund is inadequate to address the basic management and habitat conservation needs necessary to ensure healthy wildlife populations in Maine. The Department is supportive of exploring additional revenue sources to ensure that we can support the conservation of Maine's most vulnerable species.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.