



University of Maine System Testimony in Opposition to LD 988, An Act to Allow Hunting on University of Maine System Property — Presented by UMS Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer Samantha Warren — April 10, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Sam Warren and I am the Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer for the University of Maine System (UMS).

Our System has a strong tradition of supporting the North American model of wildlife conservation, of which hunting is foundational, through our tripartite mission of teaching, research, and service. For example, at our University of Maine Cooperative Extension 4-H Camps and Learning Centers, we partner with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife (MDIFW) to provide hunter safety courses and certification to hundreds of Maine youth each year. UMaine research also informs the State's management of key wildlife populations and our System prepares Maine's wildlife conservation workforce, including many of MDIFW's wildlife biologists and game wardens. Legislative appropriations for UMS, which have long not kept pace with inflation, will be essential to our ability to sustain and strengthen these vital programs and services for Maine in the future.

As part of our recognition of Maine's hunting tradition and consistent with our public mission, **UMaine has long allowed hunting on thousands of acres of the forest land we directly own or manage.** However, last fall, the university became aware that a dozen individuals had been told they could hunt on university research farms by those not formally authorized to grant that permission. Students, faculty, staff, and external partners are actively using these properties for research and extension necessary to the success and sustainability of the livestock and dairy farmers, tree fruit and vegetable growers, wild blueberry producers, and potato processors in your districts and throughout Maine. At the time, we publicly acknowledged that our employees and the members of the public who sought hunting access did so in good faith and we clarified that the research farms, which collectively comprise about 1,200 acres and are located in Jonesboro, Monmouth, Old Town, Orono and Presque Isle, were not open to hunting.

The questions and concerns raised as a result led the university to convene a group to draft an official policy for hunting on our property. That policy, which remains under development, will balance the need for our researchers and partners to safely engage in education, research, and extension activities on university-owned and managed property while also promoting equitable public access to more than 10,000 acres of our land, including for hunting.

When that policy is finalized before the fall hunting season, I am happy to provide a copy to this Committee, which may wish to carry over this bill until then. Our policy will also be

publicly available on the UMaine website and shared with local stakeholders, including sportsmen's groups. In the meantime, I would remind this Committee that our System has long held and must maintain the independent authority to manage our land, consistent with our mission and any conditions by which the land was given or leased to us, hence our position against LD 988.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Maine's public universities and I welcome your questions.