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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Good afternoon Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. I am Representative Michael Ray, and I represent the towns of Appleton, Islesboro, Liberty, Lincolnville, Montville, Morrill and Searsmont in House District 40. I am here to present LD 1525: An Act to Promote Firewood Banks in Maine.

Everyone here knows that Maine has its share of trees, and that Mainers burn more firewood than most. And I'm guessing pretty much everyone in this room either grew up with a stove in the house, knows someone who heats with wood, or does so themselves. The problem this bill - in its original or amended form - aims to get at is that not everyone can always afford doing this, but they still need to stay warm.

Enter the wood bank. As I'm sure you're going to learn by hearing from the people behind me, a wood bank can take many forms depending on local conditions and the wishes of those doing the work. But what they all have in common is that they offer a partial solution to the problem of heating insecurity by donating firewood to people who can't afford it. So, the more wood banks there are, the more people don't experience a cold winter.

By directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to promote the creation of wood banks - to give people who may not know how to get one started the information and encouragement they need so that they can then help their neighbors - the State of Maine will be helping people help people. Two problems addressed.

District 40: Appleton, Islesboro, Liberty, Lincolnville, Montville, Morrill and Searsmont

Finally, I just want to say a few words about the sponsor's amendment to LD 1525 should you decide to consider it. After discussions with DACF, I realized that the original language would cause the Department to lose some much needed revenue, as well as be tasked with entirely new administrative burdens. So for that reason, and in hopes of building a lasting and sustainable system of education about and promotion of wood banks in Maine, I removed language that called for donations, reduced liability, and environmental impacts.

Thank you, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Amendment to LD 1525
An Act to Promote Firewood Banks in Maine
Proposed by Representative Ray
April 14, 2025

Amend the bill in section 1 as follows:

Sec. 1. 12 MRSA c. 810 is enacted to read:

CHAPTER 810

FIREWOOD BANKS

§9731. Firewood banks

The bureau shall promote the development and public awareness of firewood banks in this State in accordance with this section.

1. Definition. A "firewood bank" is an organization that purchases or accepts donations of firewood and makes firewood available free of charge to individuals and families in need of heating assistance.

2. Public promotion; maintain list of operating firewood banks. The bureau shall:

A. Provide information to the public for the purpose of increasing awareness of the resources available at firewood banks and the charitable efforts needed to maintain firewood banks in this State; and

B. Develop and maintain, on the bureau's publicly accessible website, a list of all firewood banks operating in the State.

In fulfilling its obligations under this subsection, the bureau may consult with the University of Maine System Cooperative Extension Service.

3. Informational resources for firewood banks. The bureau shall develop and dispense informational resources to promote the successful operation of firewood banks in this State. In fulfilling its obligations under this subsection, the bureau may collaborate with the University of Maine System Cooperative Extension Service.

~~4. Forest harvesting of state-owned land; offer to donate firewood required. When timber or forest harvesting operations are conducted on state-owned land and any part of that land is located within 50 miles from a firewood bank that is listed on the statewide list of firewood banks maintained pursuant to subsection 2, paragraph B, the State shall offer as a donation to that firewood bank at least 8 but not more than 13 cords of hardwood. The bureau shall determine how~~

~~many cords of hardwood the State is required to offer with respect to a particular timber or forest harvesting operation.~~

~~5. **Liability.** A firewood bank and the municipality or county in which a firewood bank is operating is not liable for any damages caused by the taking or use of firewood from the firewood bank.~~

No changes to section 2 of the bill:

Sec. 2. 38 MRSA §342, sub-§18 is enacted to read:

18. Guidance to firewood banks. The commissioner shall provide guidance to municipalities or counties in this State operating firewood banks concerning management of environmental impacts and solid-waste disposal associated with the operation of a firewood bank. For the purposes of this subsection, "firewood bank" has the same meaning as in Title 12, section 9731, subsection 1.

SUMMARY

The bill defines “firewood bank” as an organization that accepts donations of firewood and makes firewood available free of charge to individuals and families in need of heating assistance. This amendment clarifies that a firewood bank may also purchase firewood for the same purpose.

The amendment strikes from the bill the requirement that any time there are timber or forest harvesting operations on state-owned land located within 50 miles of a firewood bank, the State is required to offer a donation of 8 to 13 cords of hardwood to that firewood bank.

The amendment also strikes from the bill the provision that clarifies that a firewood bank and the municipality or county in which a firewood bank is located is not liable for any damages caused by the taking or use of firewood obtained from a firewood bank.

The amendment changes references to the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service to the University of Maine System.