



**Testimony in Support of L.D. 1737 (as Amended by the Sponsor)  
An Act to Ensure the Future of Maine's Sporting Camp Heritage  
By: Jason A. House- Owner of Macannamac Camps  
May 19, 2025**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee (HHS). My name is Jason House and my wife, and I own and operate Macannamac Camps. I am a third-generation sporting camp owner with family ownership dating back 65 years and two sets of camps. I am also the Vice President of the Maine Sporting Camp Association (MSCA).

I'd like to express my strongest support for L.D. 1737. This regulatory relief bill is essential to preserve the sporting camp heritage industry so many of our clients cherish. Many camps will be forced to close unless DHHS rules are modified to reflect the realities of business operations in the North Maine Woods.

In 2020, I sold my previous camps and acquired Macannamac in 2022. The 2020 sale was seamless with a few minor requirements. However, the stark changes in the approach to licensing over the last five-year period are astonishing, at best. And I am finding other camps owners facing licensing challenges.

Although Macannamac's annual license was routinely approved, we were ordered to upgrade kitchen fixtures and plumbing after the sale. A large part of the cost was multiple inspections and work conducted by a master plumber including the cost for a four-hour round trip from town. All for work I could do myself.

*Our neighbor in the North Maine Woods, MSCA member Bradford Camps, was not so fortunate and lost an opportunity to sell their camps. To complete a sale, it was ordered to spend \$200,000 to replace a functioning septic system. They considered just closing. According to the owner, "The expense likely will not be recuperated in the sale price. In summary it was a huge initial expense, with annual added expenses, it is prone to eventual failure, it requires cleaning and maintenance, and it will not work as well or last as long as the old system. The upgrade was not required to continue our operation."*

Another concern is DHHS allowing companies to license as a "sporting camp" when, in fact they are a motel, cottage, lodging facility, or do not require a license, like a vacation home. Some do not even serve the public. The license applicants want a "sporting camp" license solely to get a Title 12 Moose Lodge Tag intended for a "sporting camp." Although the number of genuine sporting camps is declining, applicants

for the “sporting camp” license are multiplying, using all sorts of novel arguments. For example, the owner of two central Maine roadside motels, and former DHHS Health Inspector, was issued two “sporting camp” licenses. Thus, he has received two tags a year which should have gone to genuine sporting camps. He advised me he does not have a commercial kitchen.

In addition, some of you may be told this legislation will hurt veterans and critically ill children. In fact, no changes are being made to veterans’ programs or to charitable programs under Title 12. In 2024, disabled veterans received 63 moose tags under two Title 12 programs. Non-profits will still receive their allocation of moose tags under Title 12. They do not even need to be licensed as a “sporting camp” to get these tags.

The moose tags reserved for “sporting camps” under Title 12, must be a sales transaction with *clients* as a package hunt, including meals, lodging and a guide. These tags are not intended to be used as a non-profit fund-raising tool. A separate IFW Moose Auction program is established for that purpose.

In closing, MSCA acknowledges DHHS is a department with huge social responsibilities affecting many citizens. Frankly, our concerns seem trivial in comparison. We only come to this committee because we see it as a last resort to correct the issues raised in the Bill. L.D. 1737 may not be a perfect way to get appropriate regulations for the North Maine Woods sporting camps, but we believe it will give the Department the tools and encourage it to take positive action.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Jason A. House

President- Macannamac Camps, Inc.

Master Maine Guide

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
(L.D. 1737)  
May 19, 2025**



**An Act to Ensure the Future of Maine's Sporting Camp Heritage**

**1. Q. Why is this Legislation necessary?**

A. In recent years, regulatory changes and the DHHS Health Inspection Program (HIP) staff's discretionary actions have eroded the unique status of Maine's commercial sporting camps, causing thousands of dollars of losses, the closure of camps, and threatened the closure of others.

The Legislation will help restore the unique Heritage status of commercial sporting camps in Statute and place common sense limits on HIP licensing activities, thus allowing these camps to operate and allow expansion with limited bureaucratic red tape.

**2. Q. How will current regulations change by this Legislation?**

A. Despite a rural and for some an off-grid location, commercial sporting camps are being forced to follow National Building Codes intended for properties in large cities. For example, camp owners have reported a HIP representative demanded camps must follow the same rules as the Holiday Inn in Portland.

L.D. 1737 restores decades long common practice. For example, functioning septic, gray water, and privy systems will not require costly conversion to modern systems – triggering multiple inspections - as part of a license renewal or transfer. New construction of wilderness cabins would be exempt from any requirement to install and maintain expensive commercial sprinkler systems.

In addition, sporting camps meeting the requirements of a Class A restaurant would not be prevented from serving meals to the public. Also, the HIP shall not require proof of compliance with other state laws as part of the licensing process. Thus, eliminating licensing delays, multiple inspections, and additional red tape.

**3. Q. How are commercial sporting camps facing such a large impact from meeting National Building Codes and HIP licensing requirements?**

A. Despite having a functional septic system with no leaks or back-ups, one camp was forced to spend almost \$200,000 as a HIP inspector mandated change of ownership conditions. Moreover, the prior system was gravity fed, but the mandated system required three electric pumping stations at this off-grid location. It's debatable whether the new system provided any benefit to guests or the environment.

In wilderness areas, commercial sprinkler systems require prohibitive installation and annual inspection and maintenance costs. The problem is acute at off-grid seasonal locations with limited winter access and lacking a municipal water supply. Even insurance companies question the benefit since installing a system does not reduce premiums.

**4. Q. Have commercial sporting camps lost revenue as a result of HIP's discretionary actions?**

A. Yes. 2012 Legislation authorized the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to make available Moose Lodge Tags to HIP licensed commercial sporting camps for a hunt that must include lodging, meals, and guide services to be sold to clients. The purpose was to help commercial sporting camps replace the loss of deer hunting revenue, boost the rural economy, and provide funds to improve the rural tourism infrastructure. The hunts generate nationwide recognition and promote Maine as a desired adventure destination.

Unfortunately, the HIP expanded the licensing category of "recreational or sporting camps" allowing many non-traditional applicants and resulting in fewer tags available for genuine "sporting camps". For example, after lobbying from a former HIP employee who owned two motels in Skowhegan, HIP started to allow motels to be licensed as "sporting camps".

The 2012 Lodge Tag legislation was not intended as a windfall to motels, music camps, dance camps, private camps, clubs, individuals, facilities closed to the public, and other types of “recreational camps”. Therefore, L.D. 1737 closes this loophole by creating a new and unique category for genuine “sporting camps” – separate from “recreational camps”.

**5. Q. Does H.R. 1737 affect Legislation regarding Moose Tags for Veterans or children with cancer?**

A. No. The Legislature’s award of five moose permits to a nonprofit organization or organizations dedicated to providing hunting and fishing adventures to children under 21 years of age with life-threatening, critical, or terminal illnesses does not change by this Legislation

The allocation of 30 moose hunting permits to disabled veterans for a Controlled Moose Hunt in Aroostook

County will not change. Lastly, the program which in 2024 supplied 34 moose tags transferred from lottery tag winners to disabled veterans will not change because of this Legislation. Combined 64 veteran tags.

**6. Q. Clearly, modifying National Building Codes is within the authority of the State Government, however what is the impact on public safety and the environment?**

A. H.R. 1737 just makes common sense distinctions between remote camps and more accessible lodging facilities. It is not about compromising safety or the environment. Absent plans to sell or expand, lodges with legacy septic and plumbing systems are currently getting their licenses renewed and the environment is not being compromised. Food service and lodging standards must still follow food safety codes and maintenance standards.

**About Maine’s Commercial Sporting Camps**

Commercial sporting camps are in Maine’s remote wilderness areas. Quite a few are off-the-grid. Timber company roads, boats, snowmobiles, and aircraft provide the only access for many. In addition to providing lodging, meals, equipment rentals, and guide services for overnight guests or day visitors, lodge employees and guides are among the first responders to tourists in need of emergency assistance, be it a flat tire, gasoline, or a medical emergency.

In addition, lodges are also part of the burgeoning wild harvest and food-to-table trends. Hunting for food by harvesting wild mushrooms, medicinal plants, fiddleheads, fish, or big game, brings new people into the woods of Maine. Consumer choices increasingly are based on sustainability and ethical and responsible sourcing of ingredients – like the raspberry pies often featured at dinner and the abundance of moose meat which is brought home and shared with friends and relatives after a successful hunt.

Lodges provide a critical infrastructure and economic stimulus in Maine’s rural areas through employment and investments. A statewide economic multiplier effect is generated by non-resident visitors spending money along I-95 at hotels, restaurants, and retail stores. Many lodges attend out-of-state trade shows, at no cost to taxpayers, to promote the benefits of a Maine vacation and Maine Parks and Lands.

All taxpayers benefit from lodges collecting sales taxes, paying employment taxes, workmen’s compensation premiums, income taxes, real estate taxes, Department of Human Services licensing fees, public water supply licensing fees, and liquor licensing fees, to name a few. Kitchen managers must maintain professional certification through testing every five years. Also, to operate on private and public land, lodges pay access fees, land leases, higher premiums for commercial auto insurance, carry liability insurance, and pay gate fees.

Over the 150-year-plus history of commercial sporting camps in the North Maine Woods, much has changed. New road systems, ATV and snowmobile trails, and improved bike and hiking trails have ushered in a new era of day-use tourists; and short-term visits to remote locations are the norm today. Thus, sporting camps need to be responsive to this evolution to stay in business and support the tourism infrastructure.

In conclusion, in 2002, the 120th Maine Legislature issued a Joint Resolution recognizing the historical contribution to Maine’s cultural heritage by Sporting Camps and emphasized their importance to the local and regional economies. Moreover, the resolution urged landowners and abutting landowners to respect the traditions of sporting camps and allow them to thrive throughout the 21st century.

*The Maine Sporting Camp Association (MSCA) was founded in 1987 by a group of camp owners to preserve the sporting camp’s uniqueness in the State of Maine. MSCA represents commercial sporting lodges from Rangeley Lakes Region to Lubec and from Belgrade to Allagash. By working closely with other groups and exchanging ideas and information, the members of MSCA continue the tradition of providing high quality recreational experiences to individuals and their families, a quality experience that visitors will remember long after they return home. The MSCA is a 501C (6) non-profit organization that is led by a board of directors.*

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