

LD 1737, "An Act to Ensure the Future of Maine's Sporting Camp Heritage"

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
May 19, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Trey Stewart; and I proudly represent Senate District 2, which includes several municipalities in Aroostook and Penobscot Counties. I am here today to present LD 1737, "An Act to Ensure the Future of Maine's Sporting Camp Heritage."

As you may know, my district includes many sporting camps in Maine's remote forests, some established over 100 years ago. Since these camps provide lodging and meals, they are licensed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Health Inspection Program (HIP). Consequently, national codes intended for hotels and restaurants in large cities are being applied to sporting camps; however, rules that may work for Augusta hotels and restaurants are not always appropriate for rural areas and off-grid locations.

LD 1737 is corrective legislation that modifies the Department of Health and Human Services Health Inspection Program eating and lodging categories to add a new section for "commercial sporting camps" to reflect the unique needs of these iconic camps. Currently commercial sporting camps are merged within a category called "recreational camps or sporting camps." The new classification will allow the HIP to follow long-standing licensing practices including those related to septic systems and interior sprinkler systems, thus, easing a regulatory burden and allowing these traditional camps to survive and expand.

Today, since this bill is before your committee, I am also proposing an amendment to Section 1 of LD 1737, which replaces lines 2 through 10 and deletes references to Title 12. The amendment modifies the DHHS definition of "recreational or sporting camps" in Title 22, Section 2491, subsection 11: Recreational or sporting camps. The amendment will give recreational camps and sporting camps unique definitions. Recreational camps will be defined under Title 22, Section 2491, subsection 18: Recreational camps and will include all applicants which cannot qualify for a license under subsection 11: Sporting camps.

A modified definition of "sporting camp" in Title 22, Section 2491, Subsection 11 will eliminate persons obtaining a "sporting camp" license solely to obtain benefits under Title 22 and Title 12.

For example, during the 128th Legislature I supported legislation contained in Title 12 so traditional Maine sporting camps could be awarded moose tags that must be sold to clients as a packaged hunt with meals, lodging and guide services. Sporting camps need to be licensed under Title 22 Section 2491, Subsection 11 and offer meals, lodging and guide services to get the tags. Subsequently, DHHS used its discretionary authority to allow motels, cottages, private camps and even vacation homes to license under Subsection 11. Not surprisingly, a flood of new applications resulted and diminished a benefit intended solely for traditional sporting camps. The bill before you will help correct this problem.

Maine people know what a traditional sporting camp looks like, and I hope we all appreciate their contribution to Maine's heritage and how they provide many benefits to tourists visiting Maine's forests. LD 1737 is both corrective legislation to better define sporting camps and legislation that ensures this heritage industry survives and thrives.

Thank you and I hope you will join me to help ensure the future of Maine sporting camps.

Sponsor's amendment to LD 1737

LD 1737 Section 1: Delete lines 2-10 (references to Title 12) and insert the following:

Title 22, Section 2491, Definitions:

(Delete subsection 11, and insert the following:)

11. Sporting Camp. "Sporting Camp" means a facility as defined under Sec. 2, 22 MRSA 2491, Sub Sec. 2-c.

After subsection 17 insert the following:

18. Recreational Camp. "Recreational Camp" means a building or group of buildings with four or more rooms or cottages for rent, not including programs overseen by employees or volunteers of municipalities and educational institutions when the activities generally take place at municipal or institutional properties and buildings.

L.D. 1737 Section 2: *Continue with all text from L.D. 1737 starting at Line 11.*

**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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