

**TESTIMONY OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND  
WILDLIFE**

**NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST L.D. 2217**

**“An Act Related to the Electronic Tagging of Deer”**

Senator BALDACCI of Penobscot

**DATE OF HEARING: March 2, 2026**

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, neither for nor against **L.D. 2217**.

This bill directs the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to allow for the electronic registration of deer beginning in 2027. This bill also removes fees for the registration of bear, deer, moose and wild turkey.

All other states and provinces in the Northeast now allow online self-registration of deer for at least some of their deer harvest. While we feel our current system of registration provides the best opportunities for data collection to support deer management in Maine, we recognize the strong interest in a self-registration option, and we are committed to providing an excellent user experience if directed to implement such a system. However, we have some concerns about financial impacts and enforcement.

Currently, hunters registering their bear, deer, and moose in-person must pay a \$5 registration fee. There is a \$2 fee to register turkeys in person. Considering the average number of each big game species registered in recent years, eliminating registration fees would result in a revenue loss of ~\$256,000/year. As such, this bill will have a significant fiscal impact if an alternative funding source is not identified. Of the \$5 currently collected for each registered deer, \$1 is used to pay InforME for the maintenance of our online registration systems, \$2 is used to pay the registration agents for each deer that they register, and \$2 goes to the Deer Management Fund and is used to assist landowners with deer conflicts. This is the sole funding source for our Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP), a new program that provides a cost-share option to farmers that are looking to put up fencing to prevent deer damage. This program also provides free repellents, deterrents, and antlerless deer permits to qualifying landowners looking to mitigate deer-human conflicts around their farms, orchards, and nurseries.

There may also be financial impacts associated with some of our data collection. Each year, MDIFW staff and contractors collect additional data from ~10-15% of hunter-killed deer. This bio-data forms the basis of our deer management in Maine. In many parts of the state, we rely heavily on meatcutters and butcher shops for this data collection; however, in parts of the state that do not have many meatcutters, we often rely on registration stations for this data collection. With this change, it is likely we'd elect not to collect any bio-data at registration stations as other states have observed a tendency for hunters to register larger and older deer at in-person registration stations while opting to register their smaller or younger deer online. This would introduce significant biases into our bio-data, so we'd have to rely on using other data collection

methods that are less prone to bias, such as house-to-house visits. This method is very time-consuming and inefficient. We'd need to hire additional bio-data contractors every year to maintain sufficient quantity and quality of data in some parts of the state, which would be costly and require identification of a funding source.

Lastly, there are concerns among Department staff, registration station agents, and our hunters about enforceability of and compliance with online self-registration requirements. To provide further disincentives to those that might take advantage of changed registration requirements to skirt the law, we recommend requiring a mandatory one-year license revocation for failure to register deer and false registration of deer.

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