



February 23, 2021

Chair Dill, Chair O’Neil, and fellow Distinguished Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:

Animal Rights Maine is a community group of Maine residents who volunteer to protect and promote the rights of all animals in Maine. We respectfully submit this testimony on behalf of our more than 2,000 members in Maine in **strong opposition to LD95**, a resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of Maine to establish a right to food.¹

On the surface, codifying a “right to food” sounds like a good idea to protect the rights of Mainers and our collective work to diminish food insecurity. However innocuous and empowering it may seem, however, LD95 presents serious threats that if passed, will significantly hinder the ability of the Maine State Legislature, State agencies, and citizens in efforts to protect public safety through improving gun and takings/hunter safety laws or improving wildlife and farmed animal protection and management.

Codifying hunting, farming, and fishing rights in our Constitution would render all future efforts to improve our relevant state laws a Constitutional matter, with much higher thresholds to meet to pass improvements into law.

At a time when passing commonsense improvements to gun ownership laws to protect public safety are already difficult, despite firearms being one of the leading causes of death in the United States,² LD95, while perhaps well-intended, is a misguided attempt to protect a right to food.

¹ <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP0061&item=1&snum=130>

² <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMSr1804754>; <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr69/nvsr69-13-508.pdf>



Indeed, similar attempts to amend our State Constitution have been introduced and failed in past convenings of our State Legislature, under a more direct framing of the narrative driving this effort: a “right to hunt and fish.”³

Food insecurity is a real issue in Maine that would be best solved by investments and advancements of tangible hunger relief programming, such as improved access to farm-to-table efforts, education about seed saving and home-growing of produce, and a transition to a vegan diet, which 107 of the world’s leading scientists who serve on the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tell us is necessary to slow climate change and protect clean water and land.⁴

Modifying our State Constitution to accommodate special interest groups should be avoided. Groups like the National Rifle Association have stoked Second Amendment fears about gun control for decades and spent considerable resources on “right to hunt and fish” and “right to food” campaigns in efforts to amend the Constitutions of states across the nation.⁵

Texas Senator Roland Gutierrez said, “At the end of the day, what we put in our constitution is important and our constitution isn't a toy. It's not an item or a document to be taken lightly and if we are asking to put things in our constitution that say this constitutional right to fish and hunt, how about our constitutional right to watch Sunday night football or our constitutional right to love the San Antonio Spurs?... When we do these things to our constitution and make voters go out and vote for these things, it demeans the document and it demeans us.”⁶

³ Such as: LD1303 in the 126th Legislature; LD703 in the 127th Legislature; LD753 in the 127th; and LD11 in the 128th

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

⁵ <https://www.nraila.org/get-the-facts/hunting-and-conservation/why-does-nra-support-right-to-hunt-and-fish-rthf-state-constitutional-amendments/>

⁶ https://ballotpedia.org/Right_to_hunt_and_fish_constitutional_amendments#cite_note-quotedisclaimer-5



These provisions clutter a constitution and overstate the threat to these activities, while possibly limiting the amount and severity of restrictions that can be placed on sportsmen activities. Our Maine State Constitution should guarantee fundamental democratic rights, not provide enhanced protection for special interest groups.

I urge you to reject LD95 and vote Ought Not to Pass.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melissa Gates", is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Melissa Gates

Founding Director

Animal Rights Maine

Resident of Cushing, Maine

Pronouns: she/her/hers⁷

*This testimony is not submitted in affiliation with my status as a registered lobbyist in the state of Maine.

⁷ What's this? Learn more about gender inclusivity here: <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>