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AMANDA E. BEAL
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 322

*An Act To Provide Occupants of Motor Vehicles with Gold Star Family Registration Plates
Free Entry to State Parks and Historic Sites*

February 25, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Andy Cutko, and I am the Director of the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry neither for nor against, LD 322 "*An Act To Provide Occupants of Motor Vehicles with Gold Star Family Registration Plates Free Entry to State Parks and Historic Sites.*"

Like all Mainers, the Department honors the memory of Gold Star service members who have sacrificed their lives defending our country. The Bureau also recognizes the physical and emotional benefits of the outdoors for Gold Star family members. In 2020, Maine's State Parks welcomed more than 3 million visitors – an all-time record. Many of those using our State Parks were seeking the relaxation and family connection time that are so characteristic of outdoor activities in Maine.

We recognize the good intentions behind LD 322 and are also compelled to note the fiscal impact. Revenues from Maine State Park entrance fees are returned to the state's General Fund, and currently entrance fees do not cover expenses. In Fiscal Year 2020, for example, General Fund expenditures on parks totaled approximately \$7.7 million while revenues totaled just under \$5.3 million. It is our understanding that there are approximately 360 Gold Star families in Maine. Assuming those Gold Star families would otherwise need to purchase a vehicle season pass for \$105, the maximum fiscal impact would be approximately \$38,000.

In summary, the Department recognizes the admirable intent behind LD 322 and supports ways to encourage Gold Star Families to use our State Parks. At the same time, the Department needs to ensure that the Committee considers the fiscal impact of this bill as it deliberates on LD 322.

Thank you for your time.

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