



Natural Resources Council of Maine  
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**Testimony in Support of L.D. 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**

Good afternoon Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. I am Melanie Sturm, Forests and Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), and I am writing to provide comments in support of LD 322.

Maine’s public lands, including state parks and historic sites, are cherished places where families form memories, kids learn about the past and develop outdoor skills, friends gather, and people visit to get away for a while. Of course, there are ecological and economic benefits of conserved land, but the role of parks and historic sites as places of respite and reflection should not be overlooked. Giving Gold Star Families free entrance to benefit from the healing power of nature in our state parks is a way to honor these families who have sacrificed for our country.

Like bipartisan legislation introduced in U.S. Congress last year by Senator Angus King and Congressman Jared Golden, which provides [free access to national parks for Gold Star Families](#), this bill is a simple way to show appreciation for Gold Star Families. Given that the idea for the federal legislation originated with Maine lawmakers, it is fitting that the Maine State Legislature would follow suit to increase accessibility for families who have Gold Star registered plates on their vehicles.

There will be minor financial implications of this bill, low enough to justify the positive impacts it would have on hundreds of Maine residents. There are approximately 383 Gold Star Family registered license plate holders in Maine and the average resident adult entrance fee to state parks is approximately \$4.12 (not accounting for discounted senior park passes). Based on that, our rough estimate is that the impact of this bill on the budget of the Bureau of Parks and Lands would be relatively minor. In contrast, the amount of good this bill would do could be quite significant.

LD 322 is a simple but meaningful way to thank Gold Star Families for their sacrifice and help them heal, which is why NRCM supports LD 322.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue.