

March 16, 2021

Honorable members of the Department of Conservation, Agriculture and Forestry Committee, Thank you for your time. I have been employed by the Bureau of Parks and Lands for the past 43 years, forty of them as a Park Manager. I am currently the Manager at Mount Blue State Park. The following written testimony represents my opinion and not that of the Department or the Bureau. I am representing myself on my own time.

I have some concerns regarding the proposed bill LD 657. The word change from may to shall coordinate and exercise law enforcement power has significant ramifications for State Park Managers and Rangers.

Currently the Bureau Director has the authority to designate or appoint Rangers with Law Enforcement power. Over the years various attempts have been made to give some degree of authority to employees. Park Rangers have limited powers and do their enforcement largely through education and look for voluntary compliance. Any serious violations are handled with outside assistance from nearby Law Enforcement entities such as City/Town Police, County Sheriffs, State Police or Maine Game Wardens. The Manager/Ranger makes the call when those being educated need to stay after school.

There is concern that the current system isn't working thus the proposal for LD 657 and the intent to give some Park Employees Law Enforcement powers.

There are problems with the current system. Park Rangers can have difficulty when dealing with repeat offenders or those who for whatever reason just don't want to comply. In many of these instances a step beyond verbal discourse needs to be taken. Law Enforcement at this point could write a summons or evict for a minor violation. Rangers do not have this authority so must call for assistance from other Law Enforcement agencies. Under current legislation, the Bureau Director can designate certain employees to have this authority. An example of this would be a dog owner who has been warned multiple times to put their dog on a leash. Not a major violation but one that might be corrected by a simple

summons and avoid having to burden local Law Enforcement and complicate the situation.

On rare occasions serious offenses beyond the present scope of Park Rangers such as domestic violence, theft, assault require immediate intervention by outside Law Enforcement.

So, the question becomes do Park Rangers need full Law Enforcement powers and is the legislature prepared to go beyond LD 657 and provide the resources and funding to make that happen.

As a Park Manger of a state park I am responsible for all the operations and maintenance of the park. This includes managing the parks personnel, income, payroll, infrastructure, grounds and visiting public. At any given time, I could be dealing with an employee problem, collecting fees at the park's entrance booth, providing reports to Augusta as my own secretary, making carpentry or plumbing repairs, ensuring the grounds are properly cared for, cleaning a building or assisting a visitor. Now you want me to be a Law Enforcement Officer also.

Designating Managers and Park Rangers with Law Enforcement capabilities requires a whole new level of training. Park Rangers are now required to have training in low level law enforcement focusing on Compliance through education utilizing such skills as verbal judo. To gain full Law Enforcement Authority and to be able to use the tools required for that authority they would have to pass through the Maine Criminal Justice Academy. This would require creating a new funding source from current state budgets or taking funds and resources from an already strapped park system. I look around at the crumbling infrastructure of my park and question that priority.

I question whether giving park employees Law Enforcement authority would help the effectiveness of a park's operations. In most cases it will not change the way things are done. Serious criminal offenses take the cooperation of the entire network of Law Enforcement agencies. Park Rangers would still need to rely on the network near them. It is naïve to think a Park Ranger often by themselves could address a serous situation on their own.

In the eyes of the public, Park Rangers already have Law Enforcement Authority. I would argue there is a level of respect garnered by Park Rangers that isn't given regular Law Enforcement. Park visitors look up to Park Rangers and except in only a very few instances do not comply with their enforcement of rules.

I do not believe the current system needs to be completely over hauled. Continuing the present level of Law Enforcement training, adding the ability to write summons with additional training, reviewing the penalties for rule violations, and strengthening the bond between State Parks and their local Law Enforcement agencies could go far in addressing the compliance issues facing park management.

Thank you for your time,

Bruce Farnham