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March 16, 2021

Testimony in Support of LD 657: *“An Act to Clarify the Law Enforcement Powers of the Bureau of Parks and Lands.”*

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Matt McGuire and I live in Weld, Maine. I am speaking today in support of LD 657: *“An Act to Clarify the Law Enforcement Powers of the Bureau of Parks and Lands.”* The statements and opinions expressed before you here today are my own and do not represent the agency for which I work.

I have worked for the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands for 23 years, the last 17 of which I have served as a supervisor. I have held the positions of Park Receptionist, Assistant Park Ranger, Park Ranger, Park Manager II, and Park Manager IV. I am currently the Assistant Regional Manager for the Southern Region of Maine State Parks and prior to that I served 8 years as the Manager at Maine’s busiest state park, Sebago Lake.

State Park staff deal with thousands of visitors daily. The reality of having a high volume of interactions with the public is that there are some interactions that are not positive. When I have had to speak with park visitors because I witnessed a rule or law violation, or was following up on a complaint, I employed the techniques of “educate and inform,” turning the enforcement action into a teachable moment for the visitor. I enforced park rules during a lot of my interactions; these were rarely documented as incidents because it went well. However, every interaction has the potential to escalate. I often tell Rangers in training that the public brings their personal lives and problems with them when they come to the park, and you don’t know that person’s story when you interact with them.

During my time working for state parks I have responded to domestic disputes, assaults, fights and brawls (including weapons), motor vehicle accidents, watercraft accidents, cardiac events, traumatic injuries, drug overdoses, reports of child and elder abuse, poaching, theft, vandalism, missing persons, drunk and disorderly conduct, psychotic episodes, and public sexual acts. On multiple occasions I and my staff have enforced rule violations and evictions, only to find out that the individuals were wanted on felony charges or were out on bail for charges that included assault. As law enforcement officers under LD 657, Park Rangers and Managers would have the ability to request identification, run criminal history checks, and have the knowledge to do their job more safely.

During the course of my work as a Park Ranger and Manager I have needed to direct traffic, occasionally request identification from individuals, and I have asked people to stay put when I suspected they had knowledge or involvement of an incident at the park. Without a law enforcement designation, I did not have the full authority to stand in the road and control vehicles, nor were the public required to comply

and present identification to me or to remain in the area upon my request. In fact, anyone could walk away with no repercussions. We have an expression in parks that comes from the fact that our uniform shirts are gray, and we wear a badge. We say that we are “Living in the Gray.” Are we or aren’t we law enforcement? We are doing a job that we aren’t really given certification and protections to perform. There is a perception by the public that we are law enforcement officers and should act. We do act and we should be given the training and certification commensurate with the job we do.

I have been part of a group of supervisors that have created and built our current Compliance and Enforcement Academy, a two-week course of instruction helping Rangers and Managers do their job better and safer. There are important courses of the Academy curriculum, such as: Verbal Judo, Domestic Violence Awareness, Training Scenarios taken from real incidents, Gender Identity and Cultural Awareness, Incident Report writing, Oleoresin Capsicum Spray, and Self-defense training. Other components of the Academy are being taught in a manner that I believe shies away from the Bureau’s responsibility to enforce Title 12, as well as other state laws, on bureau properties. This does a disservice to the staff being trained, the public who visits our parks and public lands, and the people of Maine whose parks we steward.

LD 657 will ensure that the Bureau of Parks and Lands is taking responsibility for its’ stewardship of the public’s lands by training and designating staff to coordinate and exercise law enforcement duties over the lands and waters within its jurisdiction. Certification by the Maine Criminal Justice Academy, which sets standards for all law enforcement agencies in the state of Maine, will ensure Park Rangers and Managers have the full authority and protections to perform their jobs.

I am in support of this legislation. There are two amendments I would suggest:

First, replace all mention of “Park Ranger” in LD 657 with “Park Ranger, Park Manager I – IV, Allagash Wilderness Waterway Superintendent, Allagash Park Ranger II, Allagash Park Ranger, and designated Bureau employees.”

I would also ask that the bill be amended to ensure that current Park Rangers and Park Managers who wish to remain un-designated as law enforcement officers be permitted to do so through the end of their tenure, with the understanding that future job postings will include the requirement of successful completion of law enforcement training as outlined by LD 657.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.