

March 18, 2021

LD 675 “An Act to Clarify the Law Enforcement Powers of the Bureau of Parks and Lands”

Honorable members of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, thank you for your time. My name is Haylee Parsons, Park Manager II of Lamoine State Park and Branch Lake State Park. This testimony is only of my opinion and not that of the Departments. I am writing this testimony today in support of bill LD 675 “An Act to Clarify the Law Enforcement Powers of the Bureau of Parks and Lands.”

I have worked in several capacities for the Bureau of Parks and Lands since 2016, starting my career as a Laborer and working my way to Park Manager. As you know, Maine Parks and Lands are a major tourist attraction in our state. Last year Maine Parks and Lands saw a tremendous increase in attendance, both day use and camping. With this increase in visitors comes the increase in incidents that take place. As Park Managers, keeping our visitors and staff safe is always number one priority. With changing times, I believe a change of our role in law enforcement is essential.

In my relatively short time with the Bureau I have dealt with a number of incidents. In summer of 2020 alone, on my first day as the Lamoine Park Manager, a domestic assault took place between two intoxicated parties. Later on in the season we had an assault take place between two campers, leading to physical trauma to one and the assailant being charged and evicted from the campground. Branch Lake State Park is a busy place on the weekends, filling the parking lot and roadsides on nice days. We had several issues with alcohol, drug use, unauthorized camping, unauthorized fires, ATV use, and dogs off leash.

Park staff see issues daily - from alcohol, drugs, domestic disputes, theft, breaking and entering vehicles, littering, open-carrying a firearm not during a hunting season, medical emergencies, children or animals left in vehicles, assaults, altercations, fireworks on park grounds, smoking in unauthorized areas, drones, cutting of live trees for wood in the campground, vandalism, dogs off leash, etc. Each of these issues, although some seemingly minor, would require a call to local, county or state law enforcement to be dealt with if visitors are not cooperative.

If we, as Park Managers & Rangers, possessed the power of law enforcement we would be able to triage these issues and only involve local, county & state law enforcement when necessary. This would conserve already sparse community resources and allow park staff to be the first line in keeping visitors safe.

As I have progressed in my career with the Bureau it has become evident to me that we need a law enforcement role ever-present in State Parks for the safety of our visitors and staff. This is a change I see as being crucial for the Bureau and one I am in full support of. I thank you for your time and consideration on this subject. It is important to me and so many people that also love Maine State Parks.

Thank you,

Haylee Parsons