

Honorable members of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Sean Vaillancourt. I am the current Park Manager at Popham Beach State Park and Fort Popham, Fort Baldwin, and Fort St. George State Historic Sites. I am writing testimony today in support of the proposed bill, LD 657. I do so as an individual constituent on my own behalf, my opinions are my own, and do not represent the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands.

I support LD 657-An Act To Clarify the Law Enforcement Powers of the Bureau of Parks and Lands. It is my personal opinion that this would be beneficial to Maine State Parks. I believe the passing of this bill will help advance the safety and training of our park staff and the overall safety of the public we serve.

As you may be aware, Popham Beach State park is one of the busiest day use parks in the state. Nearly 200 thousand visitors a year pass through the gates at Popham Beach, and another 280 thousand at Fort Popham State Historic Site. While we do not run into issues every day of the year, we do find ourselves in a multitude of compliance situations. The resources and ability to do more to protect and serve the public would be of great benefit, not only to our staff, patrons, and local residents, but also to support local law enforcement who are already stretched extremely thin.

During the busy summer months, we often find ourselves waiting for help from town/county law enforcement and firefighters when incidents occur. Incidents range from basic traffic congestion and safety, accident prevention on Route 209, to domestic assault, drunk and disorderly conduct, attempted suicides, theft, missing persons, child endangerment, presence of sexual predators, and so on. In many of these cases, we have little to no ability to manage the situation other than to call dispatch, wait, and hope for the best. We cannot ask for identification, we cannot navigate in the roadways that have been blocked by traffic, assist with accidents, write any summons without a long approval process, search a vehicle for probable cause such as child abduction, hold a person we believe to have committed a serious crime, or who is obviously intoxicated and engaging in unsafe behavior. Unfortunately, due to the nature of our jobs, official titles, uniforms, and badges, this is often the expectation and perception of the public.

In 2019, I was called to assist Sagadahoc County deputies and be the first on scene on several missing persons with intent of self harm, one domestic assault in the middle of route 209 (the main route in and out of town directly in front of the state park), late night noise and nuisance disturbances (often caused by intoxicated individuals), and a mayday call from a boat capsized offshore between the state park beach and Fort

Popham (brought to our attention directly from the US Coast Guard Station and Sagadahoc County dispatchers). All of these incidents listed are just a few of many. Many minor incidents that could be prevented by more resources and abilities only make daily logs. Therefore, major incidents reported are not a full depiction of what we encounter in the field.

There is much to consider before enacting these changes, such as: job reclassifications, benefit changes, comparable wage adjustments, training, oversight, and experienced, trained law enforcement supervision. Some current staff may not be qualified to be considered for full law enforcement nor should they be asked to do so if they do not wish to have that credential and training. However, we should allow those who wish to get this training and reclassification the opportunity to do so.

The implications of this bill are complex and will most likely have a considerable cost to the bureau and the state; ultimately the passing of this bill will be beneficial to the safety and well being of park staff and the thousands of visitors who visit our state parks each year.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Sean Vaillancourt