



February 11, 2022

RE: Opposition to LD 1604 An Act to Reclassify Certain Offenses under the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Laws and Motor Vehicle Laws and Increase the Efficiency of the Criminal Justice System

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Beth Gallie and I am President of Maine Animal Coalition. Maine Animal Coalition is a not for profit dedicated to the elimination of animal abuse and exploitation through education, advocacy, and example.

As an attorney, I do understand the need to reform the criminal justice system and the overall thrust of LD 1604. However, as an animal advocated, I am particularly opposed to sections A-10 (Bear Baiting) and A-11 (Bear Hounding) of LD 1604. I believe that the proposed small fines would encourage violations of bear baiting and bear hounding laws.

LD 1604's section A-10 proposes that a person who violates 12 MRSA §11301 Placing of Bear Bait faces a civil fine up to \$125 instead of conviction of a Class E crime. Among other things, 12 MRSA §11301 states "that a person may not use bait to hunt or trap black bear without the oral or written permission of the landowner." Section 11301 also establishes time frames for placing bait and the requirement to clean up a site after a hunting season has ended. Additionally, it prohibits placing bait close to homes, campgrounds, transfer stations or roads.

LD 1604's section A-12 proposes that a person who violate 12 MRSA §11302 Hunting Bear with Dogs face a civil fine up to \$250 instead of conviction of a Class E crime. The most important

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provision of §11302 is that “A person may not, while either hunting alone or hunting with other person, use more than 6 dogs at any one time to hunt bear.”

I do not need to tell you that bear baiting and hunting with hounds is controversial. Many see bear baiting as violating “fair chase,” the cornerstone of ethical hunting. Additionally, the dumping of donuts, candy, grease, rotting garbage, etc. is not pleasant to encounter in the woods. And the consumption of such products harm wild animals in the same way it harms humans.

Importantly, the proposed change in the penalty for violating bear baiting laws would encourage unethical hunters to place bait on the land of others. Conflicts between landowners who do not want hunting on their property and unethical hunters appears to be at an all-time high.

Bear hounding is even more controversial than bear baiting. One can easily imagine a group of unethical hunters hunting with many more than six dogs and if caught splitting the fine between themselves.

I think it is important that prosecutors keep their right to press criminal charges in egregious cases.

Another reason behind the bill is to “Increase the efficiency of the criminal justice system.” Please keep in mind that the Department of Public safety recently reported that crime in Maine has dropped 60% since 2012. Also hunting is in decline in Maine as it is throughout the United States.

For the above reasons, I urge you to amend LD 1604 by at least striking sections A-10 and A-11.

Sincerely,

Beth Gallie