



March 4, 2023

Re: In Opposition to LD 428 An Act to Reclassify Certain Offenses Under the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Laws and Increase the Efficiency of the Criminal Justice System

Senator Ann Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, 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 agree with the overall thrust of LD 428. This need for reform comes from the heavy burden of a criminal record and not because the criminal justice system is overwhelmed. (In 2021 the Department of Public Safety reported that crime in Maine has dropped 60% since 2012.)

Maine Animal Coalition, however, strongly opposes the inclusion of the sections regarding bear hunting, trapping, and baiting.

Bears have a special place in the hearts of Mainer. In 2014 a statewide referendum to ban hunting bears using bait, traps and dogs almost passed with 279,617 votes in favor versus 320,873 votes against.

Almost three hundred thousand Mainer voted against bear baiting, trapping, and hunting with dogs because it is cruel and lacks the element of fair chase.

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Bear hounding involves a pack of GPS-collared dogs chasing a bear until exhausted, treed or cornered and then shot at close range. Dogs used for hounding can be injured or killed during the chase and in confrontations with the bear. Cubs can also be chased and killed.

Baiting involves luring bears to piles of donuts, candy, grease, and rotting garbage and then shooting them. And the consumption of such products harms all wild animals in the same way it harms humans.

Bear trapping is particularly cruel, and Maine is the only state that still allows it for sport. Trappers typically bait the bears with junk food to attract them to a particular spot in the woods where they are caught in foot snare traps and eventually shot at close range. A bear's instinct is to break free from these traps, which can lead to extensive injuries to the bear. Trappers have reported bears chewing off their own paws to free themselves.

LD 428 proposes that violations of Maine's unpopular bear hunting laws be merely fined. This means that hunters could run 12 dogs after a single bear and/or place bait on another's property without permission and if caught, only pay a for a small fine. A hunter's license would not be automatically suspended until he has been adjudicated of multiple violations within five years.

If you must decriminalize violations of the current bear hunting laws, I implore you to add such violations to the list of violations that result in an automatic suspension of an adjudicated person's hunting license.

Sincerely,

Beth Gallie

South Portland