

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and other distinguished members of the Committee.

I am the representing Maine Hunters United for Sunday Hunting. Our group was founded just over a year ago and is approaching three thousand members. We have a very diverse membership in our group with several hundred landowners and several hundred hunting guides. I am writing to voice our support of LD1033 to allow landowners to use and manage their property as they choose.

The estimated economic value of opening Sundays for hunting in Maine is the creation of nearly 1,900 jobs and tens of millions of dollars of economic impact for Maine businesses. Much of this economic impact will be spent in areas of Maine that have been hardest hit by the demise of the Forest Products Industry. This economic benefit to the State of Maine is larger than that of NECEC which would only provide a short-term benefit. This is the exact type of economic stimulus Maine's rural areas need.

Additionally, this is a bill that provides support to Maine's working-class families. According to the nonprofit Feeding America, 1 in 5 children in Maine struggle with hunger. Parents in low income families often work two jobs, work six days a week and are unable to take vacation. Taking time off to put food in the freezer takes money out of their pockets and compounds their financial distress. The suggestion that these people take vacation is tone deaf to the struggles of Maine's low-income and working-class families. Many of these families reside in rural areas of Maine where many families struggle after the failures of the forest products industry.

In our history, hunters have been the primary driver of wildlife conservation. As hunters we provided more funding and support for conservation than ALL other conservation groups combined. Much of what we celebrate on Earth Day each year we owe to the efforts of hunters. You are probably wondering why is this important to Sunday hunting? Because hunter numbers have been on a decline for over two decades. Hunting activity declines largely due to lack of access. The next generation of Maine struggles with the time to get in the woods to hunt. School is 5 days a week, school sports occur on Saturday. This often leaves Sunday as the only possibility for families to spend time in the woods enjoying this time-honored tradition. If we do not find more ways to get kids in the woods, we will continue to lose hunters. As we lose hunters, we lost the conservation funds that have rebuilt most of America's wildlife populations. America's model of wildlife conservation is the envy of the world. Most countries of the World have decimated their natural resources to the point of no return.

I continue to be perplexed by the most common arguments against Sunday hunting. Particularly how some of the arguments have morphed as we have requested to allow landowners to make the decision on their own. Several groups that opposed this bill did so again without even polling their members. MPGA which now represents less than 20% of Maine Guides. The Maine Dairy Farmer's Association which claimed to have polled their membership until realizing that one of their own members sponsored the bill and another cosponsored the bill. Is it believable that these groups are truly representing their members feelings on LD 1033? Maybe, I am misguided by living in a town so close to Portland. But I often speak with my neighbors who own land. My landowners consist of multiple farm owners, a devout hiker and horse-rider and a small business owner. The majority are not hunters. None of them are against Sunday hunting. One, a board member with Maine HUSH, owns a farm where the own alpacas, chickens, turkeys and pigs as well as board over a dozen horses on over 100 acres. Not to mention the hundreds of landowners that have joined Maine HUSH. I don't believe the majority of Maine's landowners are against Sunday hunting. Particularly, if they have the choice to make on their own land.

We often feel how hikers want to feel safe in the woods. 3 hikers died in about a week on Mt Katahdin last year in separate incidents. That is the same amount of accidental deaths in Maine over the past 3 decades. We need to move beyond irrational fear. I have certainly seen plenty of signs in the past three years telling me that science is real. Science is based on data and the data says hunting is an extremely safe activity. More dangerous activities like snowmobiling, hiking, ATVing, swimming, boating (and I could go on) are all allowed on Sundays. Let's regulate based on science and data.

The latest argument is that bullets don't know property boundaries. Being a guide, I'm familiar with Maine's trespass laws. A projectile moving onto posted property constitutes trespassing. Hunter's are familiar and responsible in following the fish and game rules. Sunday will be no different.

Virginia, North Carolina and Pennsylvania have all recently approved some form of Sunday hunting. I have spoken with the DNR groups in each of these states. All of them attest to the same few major points. First, call volume for enforcement was virtually the same on Sundays compared to the years prior to legalizing Sunday hunting. Secondly, Sunday activity often compared to a weekday and not like the activity seen on a Saturday. Third, they saw NO increase in complaints from LANDOWNERS! And no additional posting of property. In all three of these states, there were claims from landowners that this would happen. At some point,

Maine hunters will get to the point where they will start to limit usage on their property if others continue to oppress our rights as landowners.

There are two primary reasons landowners post their property. They have come from another State and want privacy, or their lands have been damaged by unscrupulous actors. The number one cause of posting due to property damage in Maine over the past decade has been due to ATV and Snowmobile usage. How ironic was it to hear from ATV Maine, the group that represents the cause of most damage related postings, testified against Sunday hunting? In my opinion this is ironic as you would expect the hunting community to be upset with the ATVing community and asking to limit ATV usage. However, that is not the case. Hunters in Maine are sportsman and enjoy outdoor recreation in many forms. If we do not stick together, we as outdoorswomen and men will all lose in the end.

Lastly, I want to point out a portion of testimony from Maine Forest Products Council. In their testimony they did not want to create two classes of landowner as part of their opposition. Their opposition basically does this. It says, we get to say what we do on our property, but you do not. Essentially asking our rights small landowners to be taken away. Additionally, the Corporations represented by the MFPC benefit greatly from reduced taxes on their lands through the tree growth program. This tax break essentially creates two classes of landowners which MFP had claimed to be opposed to.

I would also point out that many of the common workers employed by the large corporations of the Maine Forest Products Council are often called upon to work 6 days a week. Most of these people would embrace the ability to be hunting on their day off. Do we represent the will of the people or the will of the corporations?

I thank you for your time and ask that the Committee votes unanimously to send a "Ought to Pass" recommendation. Passing this bill is a win for our kids. It's a win for the working families of Maine. It's a win for conservation.

Thank you for your time!

Regards,

Ron Greco