

Gina Garey
Animal Wellness Action- The Center for a Humane Economy
LD 716

February 28th, 2025

Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 716- An Act to Restrict the Hunting of Coyotes

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and Members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife:

My name is Gina Garey and I am writing in support of LD 716, An Act to Restrict of Hunting Coyotes. LD 716 amends the hunting laws by establishing a coyote hunting season to be held from October 1st to March 31st, and by updating the penalties associated with hunting coyotes outside of the prescribed season.

It is long past time to amend the hunting of coyotes in Maine. From the standpoint of protecting public health in controlling Lyme disease and rabies, and enjoying access for recreational pursuits, landowners and Mainers alike will rest easier when these new restrictions are enacted. This legislation is a welcome development and a sign of progress for an important apex predator and a healthier ecosystem in Maine.

In Maine, coyotes fill the role vacated when our original predators – wolves and mountain lions – were killed off 150 years ago. They keep deer on the move and prevent them from over-browsing. As voracious hunters that feed on rodents carrying the bacterium that causes Lyme disease, they protect other wildlife and humans from tick-borne diseases that have become epidemic in Maine. Coyotes also may reduce the spread of rabies by controlling the numbers of smaller carnivores such as fox, raccoon and skunk.

Killing does not work to reduce coyote populations. Constant killing creates chaos among family groups and interferes with the mechanism that governs how they control their own population. In addition to increased breeding, aggressive coyote killing creates vacant habitats that quickly draw-in new coyotes. Constant persecution also creates pack instability, which ushers in a host of other problems.

The year-round hunting of coyote is disrespectful of private property owners. The practice of sending packs of radio-collared hounds trained to attack and kill coyotes is angering many landowners across the state. These intruders harass and frighten livestock and pets, destroy family gardens, and terrify other wildlife. Dog fighting is a felony offense in all 50 states because it is unacceptably cruel and barbaric. Hounding of coyotes is essentially legal dog fighting. Land owners who once welcomed traditional hunters are now posting their property due to this unwelcome and unnecessary violence.

Co-existence with coyotes helps farmers control rodents and limit crop damage. Many Maine farmers understand the value of coexisting with coyotes who live on or near their farms. Stable coyote families holding territory can significantly reduce the population of the mice, voles and rats that damage or destroy crops. When coyote family packs are disrupted by coyote killers, chaos and conflict ensues, and the benefits to farmers are lost. Coyotes are the most persecuted wild animal in Maine.

Presently, methods to hunt coyote include trapping, shooting, baiting, night-hunting and hounding of coyotes without limit. These largely cruel, unscientific practices can no longer be justified. It is long past time to end unethical practices unsupported by science. Coyotes are the sole exemption from Maine's "prohibition on the wanton waste of wildlife", and continuing to disrupt their family packs without limit, as Maine is doing, will only cause their numbers to grow.

The year-round killing of coyotes in Maine is a stain on our hunting legacy, occurring day and night, and even when they are trying to raise their pups. This "war" on coyotes has resulted in largely-hidden, year-round abuse and violence toward our keystone predator. It is time for intensive scrutiny, and an overhaul of our state's

coyote policy. LD 716 presents our opportunity to finally introduce a measure of protection that is in alignment with modern science and ethics.

For all these reasons and the evidence presented in support of LD 716, I ask today that the committee support a robust “ought to pass” recommendation for LD 716, giving the Maine legislature an opportunity to vote on this important measure to establish a season for hunting coyote in Maine, as we do for all wildlife species.

Thank you.

Sincerely Yours,

Gina Garey, MS

Maine State Director

Animal Wellness Action-The Center for a Humane Economy

Portland Maine