



State Motor Vehicle Inspection

In opposition to: **LD 284, LD 354, LD 431, LD 490, LD 712**

To whom this may concern and related to the above referenced legislation:

My name is Voit Ritch and I own a motor vehicle repair shop in Freeport Maine by the name of Autowerkes Maine Inc. We are a licensed Maine State Motor Vehicle Inspection station #2196. We inspect approximately 800 vehicles each year. We have been providing this service for over (3) decades now. So, I feel that I am quite qualified to testify on the issues surrounding the "Motor Vehicle Inspection Program" in Maine. This experience spans all factors relating to this "Inspection" program. Meaning from the stand points of, vehicle safety, financial cost and value, climatic, environmental, and road conditional.

First of all, this program is technically considered a "Safety" program. This relates to not only the safety of the given vehicle's occupants but also the safety of all the people around the given vehicle in all potential situations. This could be a large number of people in some situations. Safety also relates to any other vehicles and property involved. This has its own physical costs for damage to property and public or private infrastructure.

Vehicles are now safer than ever due to higher levels of engineering and technology. All of these advances however come at a cost and all of these systems can only work as well as their components. There are now hundreds more components involved that contribute to getting a modern vehicle safely down our roads. This technical complication is highly effective but only when the systems are working correctly. The future will also be radically different than even today. More driver assistance functions will only add to this level of complication. Operator reliance on them will further isolate us from our "independent" operation of our vehicles. Computers are already driving our vehicles and they are only as good as their systems. Our required "Inspection" process already covers most of these advanced systems.

Vehicle safety comes at a cost. Many of these costs are related to the vehicle itself. These costs are ever increasing relative to vehicle technology. The costs are also directly related to a vehicles age, use and mileage. It costs money to move any vehicle down a road and more so to do it safely. A vehicle inspection program is too often termed a burdensome cost. It should more appropriately be considered a necessary cost for the common good. It can also more than not be the best service value a vehicle owner can have professionally performed. The cost of a Maine Vehicle Safety Inspection is the least expensive service we perform. The cost charged is only 15% of our typical hourly charges. This represents excellent value for a vehicle owner in receiving a thorough look at their vehicle and increased piece of mind. Obviously when things are found to be worn or defective the repairs also come at a cost. It should however be considered that these costs would be substantially higher if the defective components or system completely fails causing a vehicle to breakdown or be involved in an uncontrollable situation or collision. These failure situations can also have very high collateral costs to others involved and potentially innocent persons at that. So, in the end, the minimal charge incurred to a vehicle owner to have a vehicle inspected annually is far less than the potential from neglect.

In Maine we have a heavy environmental component affecting our vehicles. This plays a tremendous role in the life and the operation of our vehicles. Not only does the environment affect the vehicles various components, but the environmental conditions the vehicle is expected to operate in means that these components and their systems need to be in good working order and available to keep the vehicle out of harm's way. Our rough roads, varying terrain and weather extremes mean that our vehicles structural integrity and safety systems come into play more often than in other areas of the country. This means that they need a higher level of scrutiny for the conditions we regularly encounter. The other environmental impact is how the elements cause direct deterioration of a vehicles components and the structures holding these things together. The scope of this deterioration is very broad and affects many things on our vehicles. Components can be affected by water (moisture), by rodents, cold temperatures and chemically just to name a few. Nature is quite cruel to our vehicles and it dramatically affects their safety. Our own habits in how we use and care for our vehicles also plays a major role. All vehicle systems are interconnected now, and one systems failure will affect many other systems.

Another of the collateral aspects of our Vehicle Inspection law is in how it coincides with federally required emissions testing in Cumberland county. I am fairly certain that this will remain a required aspect of the law for us. So at least in this individual county some sort of system will need to be maintained or instituted. This will cause some level of continued need and a system to deal with it.

Now I would like to directly answer the common argument regarding system abuse used in favor of doing away with or minimizing our Vehicle Inspection laws. It is often said that there are shops that are either stickering unsafe vehicles for a fee or ones that are overzealous in failing vehicles and charging for unneeded repairs. These cases are illegal and there are laws to enforce against this. Both the shops and the technicians are individually tested & licensed to perform this service. Removing those who are not operating in compliance with the law is the correct course of action. We have systems and enforcement in place for doing this. Doing away with a good law to keep people from breaking it is not a good solution.

Lastly, do we want each individual vehicle owner to be able to define what level of safety is adequate for operating their vehicle on our "public" roads? Alongside all the rest of us? Most vehicle owners have no idea what is failing on their vehicles until it has failed and is too late. They possess no expertise to know otherwise. There will no longer be a defined standard, and many will judge things too lightly. Human nature being what it is, that in our daily haste we would rather ignore a problem than deal with one. Putting off what will eventually become serious. Our State Vehicle Inspection program has been working for a long time and the mandate of a periodic time sensitive inspection is still important and in my professional view for the many reasons stated here, more than ever.

Please keep these thoughts in mind as you try to determine what is best for Maine and its people.

Sincerely,

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