

Testimony of Bill Williams
Deputy Executive Director
Maine Woodland Owners
In Opposition to LD 8,
An Act to Protect Maine's Forest Rangers

Senator Davis, Representative Dunphy and distinguished members of the Committee, My name is Bill Williams and I am here today representing the Maine Woodland Owners, testifying in opposition to LD 8, An Act to Protect Maine's Forest Rangers.

The Maine Woodland Owners is a landowner resource organization formed in 1975. We provide support to woodland owners owning a few acres up to a few thousand acres including providing information and education relative to forestland ownership and advocacy on issues that could potentially affect Maine landowners.

First, let me say that our organization has nothing but respect for forest rangers. They have been responsive to landowner needs on issues that are often difficult to navigate such as timber theft and trespass. Rangers have also done a great job protecting our forests from fire and more recently from invasive insects.

This bill however, does nothing to protect rangers. As written, the bill prevents the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry from prohibiting a forest ranger from carrying a personal concealed firearm. We believe this sets a dangerous precedent when a Department is prohibited from managing employees and the tools they are allowed to use in the performance of their duties. We would prefer to see the Department manage their people as they deem appropriate, given that the Department engages with employees regularly and has the best understanding of their environment.

Secondly, allowing rangers to carry concealed firearms, if they so choose, would likely lead to some rangers being armed and others not. The perception from the public would likely be that all rangers are armed. We heard from supporters of

arming rangers last session that having some rangers armed and others not would create a dangerous environment for rangers.

As written, this bill leaves the choice of firearm and caliber up to the ranger with no requirement for training, and the Department having no control over the make model or condition of the firearm. This could lead to a less safe environment than is currently perceived.

We also question whether or not rangers would still have liability protection from the Risk Management Division if there ever was an incident involving the rangers use or handling of their personal firearm while on the job. Although this is not our issue, we believe the question should be answered.

Landowners expect forest rangers to respond to their issues and play the role as problem solver, not making snap decisions, but facilitating a solution to the landowner's problem. Land owners expect rangers to take the time they need to formulate a plan to mitigate the situation. In fact, rangers were hired with this in mind. The Department, Bureau and Division leaders have always encouraged rangers to be thoughtful and creative when facing problems in the field.

I was a forest ranger for over 33 years. The last 10 years of my career I served as the Director of Forest Protection, or Chief Ranger as it is commonly referred to today, for the Maine Forest Service. I don't know if I can be of any assistance to this Committee in work session, but would be happy to try if the Committee wishes.

Thank you for your attention and the opportunity to speak before this Committee.