

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND
WILDLIFE**

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 798

**“An Act to Eliminate the Antlerless Deer Permit Fee for Holders of
Senior Complimentary and Senior Lifetime Hunting Licenses”**

Presented by Representative LANDRY of Farmington.

Cosponsored by Senator BLACK of Franklin and Representatives: CLUCHEY of Bowdoinham, DILL of Old Town, O'CONNELL of Brewer, RUSSELL of Verona Island, SHAW of Auburn.

DATE OF HEARING: March 20, 2023

Good afternoon Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 798**.

This bill eliminates the fee for one antlerless deer permit for holders of a senior lifetime hunting license or senior complimentary hunting license.

In 2022, we introduced a suite of changes to the way we regulate the harvest of antlerless deer. These changes were designed to improve our ability to meet doe harvest objectives by making the harvest of antlerless deer a more attractive option and by trying to get permits into the hands of hunters that are more likely to use them. One change made during this process was to charge a \$12 fee for antlerless deer permits. This change placed an appropriate value on the opportunity to take an additional deer, generated revenue for deer wintering area acquisition and management, and increased the likelihood that hunters applying for permits would be motivated to use their permits. Getting permits into the hands of hunters that are likely to use them is critical to achieving Department harvest objectives.

There are currently over 40,000 Maine senior lifetime and senior complimentary license holders, and just over 11,000 of the 2022 antlerless deer permit lottery applicants were senior lifetime or senior complimentary license holders. It is unknown how many of the 40,000 license holders would apply for a guaranteed free antlerless deer permit if this bill were passed, but it would likely exceed 11,000, perhaps significantly. We are

concerned that if these hunters did not have to pay a fee for an antlerless deer permit, they would be less motivated to use their permit, resulting in an erosion in the integrity of our deer management program and a return to some of the issues experienced prior to 2022.

This bill would also result in a negative fiscal impact of \$12 per permit issued to senior lifetime or senior complimentary license holders, plus up to an additional \$36 in federal funds, per permit. These funds would otherwise have been used in efforts to acquire and manage deer habitat.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.