



Testimony of

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Before the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry in Support of LD 108 – An Act to Establish a Logger Relations Advocate Within the Maine Forest Service

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Dana Doran, and I am the Executive Director of the Professional Logging Contractors of Maine. The Professional Logging Contractors of Maine (PLC) is the voice of Maine's logging and trucking industry. The PLC was formed in 1995 to represent independent contractors in a rapidly changing forest industry.

As of 2017, logging and trucking contractors in Maine employed over 3,900 people directly and were indirectly responsible for the creation of an additional 5,400 jobs. This employment and the investments that contractors make contributed \$620 million to the state's economy. Our membership, which includes 200 contractor members and an additional 120 associate members, employs over half of the individuals who work in this industry and is also responsible for 80% of Maine's annual timber harvest.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of our membership in Support of LD 108 – An Act to Establish a Logger Relations Advocate Within the Maine Forest Service. We would also like to thank Representative Landry for sponsoring this legislation and for providing the opportunity to start a conversation regarding the needs of loggers before this committee.

The logging industry in Maine was in the midst of a reinvention process until the onset of COVID 19 and the digester explosion at the Jay mill in April 2020. As evidence, in 2020, Maine logging contractors harvested 11 million green tons of wood, which is approximately 367,000 truckloads of raw fiber. This harvest level was down by more than 15% from 2019, when Maine contractors harvested 13.1 million tons, primarily due to the loss of the Pixelle mill.

Further, as a result of other mill closures, curtailments and inflation created by the response to COVID 19, we are estimating that Maine has suffered at least another 15% additional reduction (total of 30%) in harvesting capacity and the layoff of nearly 1,000 people in harvesting and hauling since 2020. Our updated economic impact study with the University of Maine, which will be released at our annual legislative breakfast on March 3rd, will substantiate these estimates. For an industry that is responsible for over \$620 million of direct economic impact each year, it has likely led to a direct loss of close to \$100 million of economic activity per year since 2020.

I provide all this context because 100% of our membership are small businesses who are fighting for their lives right now. Most logging and trucking firms in Maine are family-based businesses that pride themselves on providing stable places of employment. They are committed to their rural communities and the people that work for them.

Our membership asked Representative Landry to sponsor this legislation to start a conversation about the needs of loggers and see if the Maine Forest Service can add a position that will help provide a new customer service perspective, dedicated to an industry that needs all the help that it can get. Currently, there is no one at the Dept. of Ag., Conservation and Forestry that is dedicated, nor understands the specific needs of loggers. Landowners, foresters, and farmers have dedicated staff that they can contact for questions, but loggers do not.

We are generally not in favor of adding size and scale to the state bureaucracy, but contractors need assistance that is specific to their businesses to assist with efficiency and profitability. They are extremely time constrained and need help navigating the bureaucratic minefield that is all around them.

The Maine Forest Service has at least 20 licensed foresters on staff, including District Foresters, Enforcement Foresters and even an Urban Forester, but no one from the logging industry with operational experience that directly understands their needs to assist with logging issues. Licensed foresters have tremendous knowledge on forest policy, licensure, and silviculture, but generally do not have operational experience running equipment or a small business.

Not that it is germane to this conversation, but the Department of Inland Fisheries also has two landowner advocates that work to educate landowners but also to advocate on their behalf. The Dept. of Marine Resources has staff dedicated to working directly with fisherman on questions related to licensure and regulations. Yet, the Dept. of Ag., Cons. and Forestry has no dedicated staff who are expressly charged with helping loggers directly.

I would also ask each of you review that Maine Forest Service website where there is very little information that is dedicated to loggers, the majority, probably more than 90%, is dedicated to landowners and foresters. There is a Foresters Institute, how to select a private consulting forester, and an entire page dedicated to Woodland Owners. Even the Working in the Woods and/or Education sites are dominated by information for foresters and landowners. If you didn't look closely, you wouldn't know that information for loggers is available.

Do other states have similar positions? The answer is yes. Vermont and the state of California (<https://www.fire.ca.gov/programs/resource-management/forest-practice/timber-harvesting/licensed-timber-operators-ltos/>) each have staff dedicated to working directly with logging contractors to help them with rules and regulations, training, permits, equipment financing and a multitude of other services. If Maine does the same, it would not be alone and can look to the success of other states for taking this leap.

It is also incredibly hard and uncomfortable for loggers to ask questions of Maine Forest Service staff without fear of retribution or investigation. This wasn't always the case, but in the last decade, Maine loggers have grown fearful that if they ask for help or ask questions, they will quickly be investigated or fined.

With respect to resources for this position, we understand that there will be an impact on the General Fund and this will have a fiscal note. However, over the last few years, the ACF has hired a second Deputy Commissioner, has hired a new Director of Natural Resource Markets and Economic Development, a Market Development Director in Agriculture and is preparing to hire a Carbon Forester. It appears that funds are available, and all the constituencies are receiving extra assistance except loggers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the opinion of our membership before you today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.