



SAM ILA

205 Church Hill Road, Augusta, ME 04330

David Trahan, Executive Director

david.trahan@sportsmansallianceofmaine.org

www.samila.org

Testimony In Support

LD 79, An Act to Protect Shooting Ranges

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Presented by David Trahan, Executive Director of the SAM Institute for Legislative Action

February 6, 2019

The honorable Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau, members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, my name is David Trahan, I am the Executive Director of the SAM Institute for Legislative Action and I am testifying in Support of LD 79, An Act to Protect Shooting Ranges.

We would like to first thank Rep. Corey for sponsoring this important SAM ILA legislation. This bill has been introduced to help resolve a conflict in Maine law that was generated when well-intentioned legislators tried to make hunting in Maine safer for homeowners and farmers by restricting the discharge of firearms within 300 feet of a dwelling or building. These two requirements are fairly new and I know they were meant to protect property and homeowners during hunting season, but, like many new policies, there may be unintended consequences. In this case, no one envisioned neighbors, who owned land within this 300-foot safety zone next to shooting ranges would use this no discharge within 300 feet of a building, whether occupied or not, to shut down pre-existing shooting ranges, but that is what could and did happen.

One landowner that purchased a property next to a shooting range figured out if they erected a building next to the range, they could shut them down, which they did. I am not dismissing the concerns made by this particular landowner related to public safety. Public safety is always important, but there are ways of mitigating safety concerns under other state statute. Currently, any range that is deemed unsafe can be shut down until safety problem are fixed and that is true without the 300-foot safety zone law. This 300-foot provision was just a convenient way to do it. This is a very important bill and I hope the committee will support it.

This bill has highlighted the conflict between homeowners and shooting ranges that demands a broader debate on statewide policy in two areas:

How do we mitigate the growing conflicts between neighbors and shooting ranges?

And

How do we insure federal and state grants are available for clubs to continue making long needed safety improvements to existing shooting facilities?

I thought the second question had been addressed with new federal Pitman-Robertson money, but it appears I was wrong, that money has not been allocated yet, and there is some confusion whether it will be available for Fish and Game Clubs and others that have public/private ranges.

The answers to those two questions are complex, but I have already started discussions with our new Commissioner and feel we can find solutions. For committee member interested in exploring solutions to those two issues I would welcome your help in a separate discussion after the Public Hearing.

Safe shooting ranges are critical to protecting the public. If we lose our ranges, citizens will still find a place to shoot. It may be the back yard or abandoned pits, but it will happen.