Chair & Committee Members,

I oppose HB 2819.

While I fully support strong wildfire prevention and responsible forest management, I have serious concerns about the broad authority this bill would confer and the lack of clear safeguards against misuse or misinterpretation.

The standard of "reasonable grounds" is vague and subjective. Unlike "probable cause," which has a long-standing legal definition and judicial precedent, "reasonable grounds" opens the door to inconsistent interpretation. This could lead to citations being issued based on assumption, bias, or incomplete information—especially in rural areas where enforcement personnel may have wide discretion but limited oversight.

Expanding citation authority beyond trained law enforcement to include individuals simply "authorized by the State Forester" raises accountability concerns. It is unclear what training or qualifications these individuals would have, what checks would be in place to ensure they act within the scope of their authority, and what recourse citizens would have if citations are issued unjustly.

This bill risks undermining public trust and cooperation. Fire prevention efforts are most effective when there is collaboration between landowners, local communities, and state agencies. Granting expanded enforcement powers without clear boundaries could lead to overreach and alienate those who are essential partners in responsible land stewardship.

If this legislation moves forward, I strongly urge the committee to consider amendments that would:
1. Clearly define "reasonable grounds" in alignment with legal standards;
2. Limit citation authority to personnel with law enforcement training;
3. Include transparency and appeals processes for those cited.

As written, this bill raises too many red flags to support. For the sake of fairness, clarity, and effective wildfire prevention, I respectfully urge you to vote no on this proposal.