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**TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM BRIDGEO
IN FAVOR OF LD 164
“AN ACT TO FUND THE LAKE RESTORATION AND
PRESERVATION FUND”**

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich and Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

I am Representative Bill Bridgeo and I am speaking in support of my bill, LD #164 “An Act to Fund the Lake Restoration and Preservation Fund.” This fund, authorized by the Legislature many years ago and found in Title 38, Section 401N, was created to enable the Department of Environmental Protection to provide grant funding to local entities working to address serious threats to the water quality of Maine's Great Ponds. A worthy goal indeed - except for the fact that there has not been any money appropriated to the fund, as far as I can determine, since the 1990's.

LD 164 would be a significant step to addressing this oversight by appropriating \$9 million in each of the two years of the upcoming biennium. It would enable the DEP to award cost-sharing grants to sponsoring entities

that have state-approved strategies for dealing with severe algae blooms, milfoil infestations and related problems. Only those lakes and ponds with public access and identified by the DEP as impaired or on their associated watch list would qualify for this particular infusion of funding.

I became acutely aware of the need to fund this program when I was campaigning in my district last fall. Within District 60 (the east side of Augusta) there is a large and beautiful lake – Togus Pond – that is home to many year-round residents as well as a large number of seasonal cottages. Hundreds, I would say. In recent years, the lake association has been impressively proactive in contending with a severe algae bloom that occurs annually – some years worse than others. In conjunction with the City of Augusta, the association has utilized a dedicated cadre of volunteers to do surveys, write grants for funding studies, taken numerous steps to reduce the shedding of phosphorous into the lake from camp roads and abutting properties, helped secure funding to install a state of the art fishway to enable alewives to return to their native breeding area and, with DEP's guidance, identify a recommended \$850,000 alum treatment to be applied to sections of the lake bed over two summers to neutralize the phosphorous that has accumulated over many decades that is the cause of the algae bloom.

With a goal to fund-raise as much as half of the total projected cost of the alum treatment, the association has already secured pledged commitments of almost \$150,000. Were there to be available DEP matching funds, they would be a terrific incentive for all of the shore front property owners (and perhaps the city government) to raise the rest of what they need.

Of course, the land at the bottom of all Maine's Great Ponds belongs to the people of Maine and any State investment in restoring and preserving their water quality is, in my mind, enlightened self-interest.

This is not, of course, an issue for Togus Pond alone. It is one of twenty-one lakes around the state that the DEP classifies as threatened due to issues like

algae and milfoil and other afflictions. DEP also has another twenty-five or so lakes on its related watch list. Given the ever-increasing problems associated with climate change, I believe that list is only going to grow.

The beauty and high quality of Maine's rivers, streams and lakes are a vital component of what makes our state so special. Whether we make investments to protect and restore that quality so as to protect property values, or to encourage tourism, or to preserve the legacy of Maine's pristine environment for those to come, we have, I think, a moral obligation to leave our environment as good or better than we found it. This bill makes a modest contribution to that imperative.

To that end, I am hopeful that this committee will be able to unanimously report out favorably on LD 164 and also advise the Appropriations Committee that this funding is a priority for inclusion in its final recommended version of the State budget.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions and if I can't I'm sure there are advocates here in the room planning to testify who can.