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Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 1473

An Act to Protect Certain Unfiltered Drinking Water Sources

Dana Colihan, Co-Executive Director | May 1st, 2023

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

My name is Dana Colihan, I live in Portland ME, and I am co-executive director of Slingshot. I'm testifying in support of LD 1473, an Act to Protect Certain Unfiltered Drinking Water Sources. We believe everyone deserves the right to clean, affordable drinking water, which is why we are testifying in support of this bill.

Whether your community is facing polluted water, a leaking landfill or air pollution from oil tanks in your backyard, you deserve to know the facts, make your voice heard, and create the changes you want to see. Slingshot is an environmental justice organization, working alongside communities most impacted by environmental health threats to take aim at polluters and build community power.

As we continue to learn from Indigenous leaders, water is life. Everyone deserves access to clean drinking water. However, all too often, communities' health is threatened by water contamination—whether from chemicals, heavy metals, or toxins. Through PFAS in particular, we are facing one of the largest water contamination crises of our lifetime. Now more than ever, it's of the utmost importance to protect our drinking water.

Maine is fortunate to have pristine and abundant drinking water. As we have been hearing, almost a quarter of all the bodies of water with filtration waivers in the country are located in Maine, providing water to fourteen different municipalities. Incredibly, these include the state's three largest cities. Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor. These communities alone account for drinking water of 135,000 Mainers, not even including the other municipalities these bodies of water serve.

However the quality and affordability of this drinking water is at stake. Activities in the watershed like clearing of land, the creation of impervious surfaces like driveways, the fertilization of lawns—can cause runoff and load phosphorus into drinking water sources, degrading the water quality. Such pollution can threaten to strip a filtration waiver from these bodies of water. This means actions in upstream municipalities who's drinking water is not served by the same source, can have an impact on the quality and affordability of other Mainers' water.

This is concerning in Lewiston and Auburn in particular, where there are more Mainers of Color, working class, and poor residents than many other communities in the state, making it an environmental justice community. These residents would be doubly impacted in that they would not necessarily benefit from any changes to proposed land use development strategies and as ratepayers would assume a disproportionate amount of the costs associated with loss of the filtration waiver.

However all of these bodies of water deserve additional protections. LD1473 would exempt the watersheds of bodies of water with filtration waivers from the additional development that were allowed through legislation that was passed last session.

We ask you to be decisive in protecting the people of Maine, and listen to the voices of residents who stand to be impacted by the loss of a filtration waiver by supporting LD 1473. Please protect our communities through stronger protections for our drinking water. Thank you.