

tara Karczewski-Mitchell
Augusta
LD 832

Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
RE: D832- An Act to Provide Funds to Reduce the Debt of the Vassalboro Sanitary District

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and members of the joint committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Tara Karczewski-Mitchell, and I am a customer of the Vassalboro Sanitary District and a resident in Vassalboro, Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 832, to provide one-time funding to the Vassalboro Sanitary District for debt reduction.

You have likely heard the back story about how we got here so I'll spare you the details. The Vassalboro Sanitary District was informed that they would be fined daily until the issue was rectified. Unfortunately, they proceeded with the project with only some of the money but not all and when I say all I'm talking about millions of dollars. Through research I have learned that getting money after a project has started or has finished is very difficult. This oversight shouldn't burden approximately 200 of its customers! I want to be clear LD 382 is to help the Vassalboro Sanitary District with debt reduction however at the end of the day 200 customers are expected to foot this massive bill. We are talking about millions! In Fall of 2023, a small group of us banded together. We were able to organize multiple meetings with the town, the Vassalboro Sanitary District, many of our neighbors negatively impacted. Multiple political affiliates were invited which some did participate and some kindly declined. We started a petition to see if the town would consider this a town issue vs an issue that only 200 families were struggling with. This unfortunately, didn't resolve the issue. We contacted lawyers and reached out to multiple legal resources which didn't help. Please refer to the local newspapers in 2023 and 2024 to see our efforts. We contacted the media to keep the pressure on anyone and/or any entity that would help our cause. Everyone said no or sorry we can't help. What I can tell you is that Vassalboro is not known for its wealth and the areas that this negatively impacts are some of the poorest. What I also know is that I purchased my home approximately 14 years ago. Since then, my taxes have doubled, and my sewer bill is more than my taxes!!! When I moved in, I believe I was paying \$140 quarterly and now for a family of two I am paying \$350 quarterly. What are families of 4+ paying?? The increases throughout the years have been astronomical. I have calculated that we are paying 300% more than any other town in Maine and 60% more than the national average. When I was more actively involved with this issue 35% of us were late with our payments and there were multiple liens. There is no way after the last increase or two that these numbers have not sky rocketed. In 2023 and 2024 I said is that these financial obligations/decisions are of no fault of its customers, but we will be held accountable, and this bill is not sustainable for most of us. Vassalboro residents need your help in order to keep our properties. The folks that rent need your help so the landlords can charge a reasonable monthly rate.

I urge you to vote for this bill which would provide much needed debt reduction to the 200 customers that rely on the services of the Vassalboro Sanitary District.

Thank you for your time and I'm willing to answer any questions the committee may have.

Respectfully,

Tara Karczewski-Mitchell
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