

Senator and Chairwoman Denise Tepler, Representative and Chairwoman Victoria Doudera, and Honorable Members of this Environment and Natural Resources Committee, thank you in advance for your time and attention to my comments regarding:

- LD 795 which appears intended to exempt the mining of a valuable lithium deposit from Maine's carefully developed regulations intended to protect Maine's people, animals, and environment from the risks inherent in mining operations including the potential damage that occurs when mining operations fail to adhere to those regulations – and
- LD 1073 which calls for strengthening the Maine Metallic Mineral Mining Act, including requiring a human health impact statement, baseline medical/health data collected from nearby residents, and “specific plans to provide for and fund the perpetual treatment and monitoring of mine waste and tailings.”

My name is Gordon Street, and I live and work in Lincoln, Maine. But back in 1981, I was a news reporter who had recently started a new job back in my hometown of Nashville, Tennessee, when I got a call to come in on a day off to cover a mining disaster in Harlan County, Kentucky. When we got there, the torrential rain was still falling, and the small community below the coal mine's slurry pond was all but gone after the pond's dam gave way.

I have never forgotten that day, seeing the devastation a tailing pond failure can cause, but when I searched online to refresh my memory of the details before writing this testimony, I discovered it was only one of almost 80 on the Mineral Policy Institute's list of tailing pond failures around the world since 1960, one of 26 in the U.S. The MPI list documents that 96,000 cubic meters of coal slurry created a wave of water that created the devastation I witnessed: 30 houses damaged, another 3 washed away, fish killed all along the Clover Fork of the Cumberland River, and – amazingly but fortunately – only 1 person killed.

America has been lucky. This was the deadliest of the MPI's list of tailing pond failures in the U.S., other countries having experienced losses of as many as 19 people in tailing pond failures. Perhaps our more stringent mining regulations have saved lives.

While this was the most devastating damage from mining I had witnessed but not the first. Reporting in Tennessee, I had covered mining accidents, the environmental consequences of mining, and the human toll of mining - from sometimes violent miners' strikes to health consequences for miners such as black lung. We do not want to import those problems here.

I realize that Maine has an opportunity to provide economic benefits to not only its own residents but also the nation if pegmatite can be mined and lithium extracted to be used in

manufacture of batteries for everything from phones and computers to storage of electricity produced by solar arrays during the day to be utilized on cloudy days or at night. But we need to be careful not to forget the lessons of the history of mining in these United States, including not only past environmental and medical costs but also disasters caused by tailing pond failures. Do not forget that lithium mining involves evaporation ponds.

This is NOT the time to relax mining regulations but to make sure that what we have in place is adequate to protect our people, our animals, and our environment. Therefore, I implore you to reject LD 795 and consider whether the strengthening of the Maine Metallic Mineral Mining Act proposed in LD 1073 would actually save lives, health, and perhaps even money in the long run.

Thank you for your time and attention, for reading and considering my testimony. I trust you will make wise decisions.