

Sen. Rachel Talbot Ross, Rep. Bill Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Barbara Vickery and I live in Richmond. I am here to offer my strong support for **L.D. 1323 "An Act to Prohibit the Use of Neonicotinoid Pesticides and the Use and Sale of Neonicotinoid-treated Seeds."**

I am a conservation biologist and I spent my career first as Botanist for Maine's State Critical Areas Program and then at The Nature Conservancy as Conservation Programs Director. After retirement I coedited a book that was my late husband's life work, published after his death, The Birds of Maine, the first comprehensive update of the status of birds in the state and their conservation needs in 40 years.

While working on that book I learned that the numbers of many Maine birds are declining alarmingly, and that, among all of these, those in most trouble are grassland birds and birds that feed on insects in flight, such as bank, barn and cliff swallows. One salient reason is that there are simply fewer flying insects for them to eat. I am sure you have noticed that you are getting fewer insects on your windshields than you used to. The apocalyptic decline of insect diversity and abundance has multiple causes, but one cause is now well understood to be the widespread agricultural use of neonicotinoid insecticides that began in the last two decades. The cause and effect is so clear that the European Union banned most uses of neonics ten years ago. Recently New York, Vermont, Quebec and Ontario followed suit.

Neonics are extremely toxic, persistent, and ubiquitous. The EPA found that imidacloprid likely harms 80% of all threatened and endangered species, including 70 mammals, and 77 birds. They are the most widespread insecticides in agricultural use in Maine, most often as a seed treatment, a use that the EPA has exempted from reporting requirements. The seeds of virtually all corn and other cereal crops that are not being organically grown are treated with neonics before planting. There they become part of the plant, affecting everything that chews, sucks - or pollinates - the plant, including not only bees, but butterflies and other pollinators, and even hummingbirds. Even more troubling is that 95% of the insecticide is not taken up by the crop plant, but leaches into the soil and from there into waterbodies, where it is particularly toxic to insects such as mayflies and all the insects that start their lives in water and then appear in abundant hatches and become food for many birds. Traces can even be found in Maine deer.

This bill is essential because it closes the gaps left by the Maine law passed in 2021 narrowly limiting some uses of neonics, most importantly by addressing their use as a seed treatment for crop plants. You might hear concerns that this will harm farmers' yields significantly. But when Quebec gave farmers the option to continue use of neonic treated seed if they got a "prescription" of need from a licensed agronomist, most farmers didn't bother to apply because it wasn't needed – the use on corn seeds dropped from nearly 100% to 2%. A Cornell study found that use of neonic treated seed in corn and soybeans "provided no overall net income benefit to farmers."

I urge you to vote Ought to Pass for the sake of Maine's hummingbirds, bees, butterflies and all pollinators, aquatic insects, and trout, and swallows and other birds that depend on them.