



April 18, 2025

Senator Henry Ingwersen, Chair  
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair  
Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

Subject: Support for LD 1550 Resolve Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Amend its Rules to Protect Water Quality by Reducing Nutrient Pollution from Septic Systems

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

Portland Water District (PWD or the "District") is a quasi-municipal utility created by private and special law of the State Legislature in 1908 to provide water to the people of greater Portland. Today, PWD provides drinking water to over 200,000 people in 11 Cumberland County member communities, and wastewater treatment services to six of those communities. The affairs of PWD are managed by a Board of Trustees composed of 11 members, all popularly elected by a plurality of the voters from the communities they represent. We do not have shareholders that profit from our activities and therefore our sole interest is meeting the needs of our customers. The Portland Water District's water source is Sebago Lake; the lake is the drinking water source for approximately 200,000 people. The District has a waiver from the filtration requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act due to the purity of the lake; this waiver from filtration saves the District's rate payers millions of dollars in costs.

The Portland Water District supports LD 1550 because it will provide greater protection for Sebago Lake, which, along with being a drinking water source, is a treasured resource for shorefront residents, boaters and anglers.

The shoreline of Sebago Lake is densely developed with more than 2000 septic systems located within 200 feet of the lake. Over time there will be more development. The sandy soils that surround the lake can absorb water from septic systems. While this natural geology has many benefits, discharging domestic wastewater into sandy soils has a potential downside. Sandy soils sometimes drain water too quickly for effective septic treatment. Wastewater flows through the sand faster than biological and chemical processes can adequately treat it, resulting in a phenomenon known as "short circuiting." This means that, although the wastewater goes into the ground, thus giving the impression everything is working, treatment may not be complete as intended. The purpose of this legislation is to address this issue.

By adding a layer of finer soil material to the leach field in these specific cases as the bill proposes, the flow of wastewater slows, allowing for better treatment. Because it happens during construction, this is a low-cost, low-maintenance measure to guard against the potential problem. Passing this bill will benefit Sebago Lake and all groundwater and surface water bodies throughout Maine.

We urge the committee to vote ought to pass on LD 1550.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Hunt", followed by a stylized flourish.

Paul Hunt  
Environmental Manager  
Portland Water District