Elizabeth Trehu
Vienna
LD 1550

I am a retired physician and live in Vienna, Maine, in close proximity to Parker Pond and Minnehonk Lake, and my family owns a camp on Flying Pond, where I am on the board of the Flying Pond Improvement Association and a member of the LakeSmart evaluation team. I am also chairman and the representative from Vienna on the board of the 30 Mile River Watershed Association (30 Mile). I am writing in strong support of 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. Our lakes are under tremendous threat from nutrient run-off, as evidenced in our watershed by the toxic algal bloom that has occurred in Androscoggin Lake every summer for the past several years, preventing swimming, boating, and other activities. Septic systems make a significant contribution to the harmful nutrients in our lakes and ponds, which in turn pose a threat to public health.

Septic system design and regulation have focused on the protection of public health, eliminating the pathogens from human wastewater that make people sick. This is generally accomplished by getting the wastewater to quickly infiltrate into the ground and with setback distances from drinking water wells and waterbodies. Pathogens live for a relatively short time in a septic system environment, so this general design in a functional system adequately protects human health.

Unfortunately, septic system design and regulations generally have not considered the fate of nutrients in wastewater. Unlike pathogens, nutrients do not die. Fortunately, in most soil types, septic systems offer some nutrient attenuation. However, in certain types of sand and gravel soils in the shoreland zone, septic systems will "short-circuit", allowing phosphorus pollution to flow back into groundwater and impact surface waterbodies. Ultimately, these nutrients also pose a threat to public health by creating the conditions that support the growth of algae that are toxic to humans, pets, and wildlife.

This bill addresses this by amending the design standards for disposal fields in a manner that addresses short circuiting by reducing nutrient loading from septic tank effluent through natural processes. It will apply the amended design standards only to soil profiles that pose a high risk of short circuiting due to the presence of sand or gravel layers in lower soil horizons or bedrock fractures, so will not cause needless changes to septic systems that don't threaten the nutrient contents of the lakes.

I urge you to support this important bill for the health of our lakes and the people who enjoy them.