

Chris Dalton
Portland
LD 1550

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

I am writing to express my 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.

I have worked as an environmental scientist in Maine for over 20 years. A main focus of my work has been protecting lakes, streams, and estuaries from pathogen and nutrient pollution. My work has included water quality sampling for bacteria, nitrogen, and phosphorus. My colleagues and I have worked with many towns in Maine and New Hampshire to create comprehensive risk assessments related to septic systems based on soil types, proximity to surface waters, and septic system conditions. Septic systems are a very challenging potential source of pollution since pathogens and nutrients can migrate fully underground, discharging to lakes or streams underwater. In the worst case scenarios, highly permeable soil or shallow bedrock can cause “short circuits” where undertreated wastewater rapidly reaches lakes and beaches.

I would bring to the committee’s attention a recent Expert Panel on Advanced Septic Systems (<https://scholars.unh.edu/prep/472/>) for nutrient reduction, in which the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership convened septic system experts from across New England and New York to recommend ways to protect water quality from septic system nutrient pollution (phosphorus and nitrogen). The panel’s focus was New Hampshire, but there were participants from Maine and the recommendations are applicable throughout the region. One of the Expert Panel’s main recommendations was to adjust the site evaluation rules to consider the nutrient retention capacity of native soils. This would help protect lakes from unsightly and potentially toxic cyanobacteria blooms. It would also help protect our estuaries from excessive algae and low dissolved oxygen which can harm aquatic life. Currently, there is no consideration in the Maine onsite wastewater rules of nutrient pollution at all, just pathogens. LD 1550 if passes, it would take that important step in Maine, making the nutrient reduction capacity of soils part of the equation when placing and designing a septic system. This will help prevent “short circuits,” protecting Maine’s invaluable lakes, rivers, estuaries, and beaches.

Sincerely, Chris Dalton
Portland, Maine