

Testimony of 7 Lakes Alliance

IN 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

Submitted: April 22, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

I am Laura Rose Day, Chief Conservation and Special Initiatives Officer for 7 Lakes Alliance. 7 Lakes is a nonprofit, watershed-based organization working to conserve the lands and waters of the Belgrade Lakes region for all. Guided by science and community, 7 Lakes collaborates with public and private partners throughout the region to ensure the health of the waters and lands of Messalonskee Lake, Long Pond, Great Pond, North Pond, Salmon-McGrath, and East Pond. We accomplish this through water quality science and monitoring, erosion prevention and control, invasive plant prevention and remediation, land conservation, and watershed-based education.

7 Lakes urges committee members to vote **Ought to Pass** 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** to keep household wastewater from septic systems from polluting Maine waters, often undetected, by "short-circuiting" through coarse sand and gravel soils in the shoreland zone directly into groundwater or nearby waterbodies such as lakes and streams.

Many Maine soil types can slow the flow rate and remove nutrients from household septic wastewater. However, septic wastewater passes quickly and largely unfiltered through sandy soils and gravel, allowing pollutants, including nitrogen and phosphorus, and bacteria that can threaten human health, to reach waterways. Phosphorus is a key cause of excessive algal blooms which turn water green and putrid, interfering with healthy outdoor activities such as swimming, diminishing property values and economic activity, and potentially producing harmful toxins.

In the Belgrade Lakes region, glacial deposits in the shoreland zone include sandy soils and gravel, creating the potential for wastewater to short-circuit septic systems and enter lakes and streams. These soil types exist, for instance, in various areas around Great Pond and a substantial portion of

North Pond. LD 1550 would help prevent short-circuiting in this landscape, which is especially important for waters such as North Pond which already experiences excessive algal blooms leading to a planned alum treatment expected to cost over \$3 million.

Finally, short-circuiting can undermine ongoing public-private partnerships to prevent and remediate algal blooms, especially on lakes already designated as threatened or impaired due to phosphorus pollution. For instance, 7 Lakes works with willing landowners through our Youth Conservation Corps and LakeSmart programs, implements significant state-administered federal Clean Water Act grants to address erosion from roads and culverts, conducts watershed surveys to assess erosion threats, and helps develop watershed-based management plans. LD 1550 would support these water quality investments through engineering standards to prevent short-circuiting.

LD 1550 offers an effective, common-sense approach to prevent "short-circuiting" of septic system wastewater into Maine's waterways. 7 Lakes urges you to vote **"Ought to Pass" on LD 1550.**

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Rose Day Chief Conservation and Special initiatives Officer