



Town of Brunswick, Maine

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Testimony of Daniel R. Devereaux

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”

In Support

Honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Daniel R. Devereaux, and I serve as the Coastal Resource Manager for the Town of Brunswick. My family also co-owns Mere Point Oyster Company and I’m one Maine’s representative on the Board of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association. Today, I offer my testimony in strong support of LD 1550.

I bring to this conversation over three decades of firsthand experience working along the shores and on the waters of Northern Casco Bay. Since the early 1990s, I have observed significant and troubling changes in our near-shore marine ecosystems. These include steep biodiversity, more frequent and intense algal blooms, unexplained shellfish die-offs, a reduction in eelgrass meadows, and accelerated shoreline erosion.

While multiple factors contribute to these changes, one clear and growing concern is nutrient loading from aging and poorly sited subsurface wastewater disposal systems—particularly those located in high-risk coastal and riverine areas.

Over the last several decades, the Brunswick coastline has experienced substantial residential growth. Modest seasonal camps have been transformed into large, year-round homes, and new residential developments continue to push into previously undeveloped shoreline areas. This coastal gentrification brings with it increasing stress on local ecosystems, particularly where outdated or improperly designed septic systems are in use.

In late 2024, our office began an in-depth review of all known subsurface wastewater disposal systems within Brunswick’s Shoreland and Stream Protection Districts. Our findings were alarming. Many of the systems, especially those installed prior to 1975, are undocumented, aging, or located in areas ill-suited for conventional designs—such as high-risk soils and shallow-to-bedrock zones. Much of Brunswick’s coastline sits atop ledge or soils that promote rapid infiltration, bypassing the natural filtration processes that would otherwise reduce nutrient pollution.

LD 1550 addresses this critical issue by directing the Department of Health and Human Services to amend existing design standards for septic systems to reduce nutrient loading through natural treatment processes. It also calls for targeted implementation—applying enhanced design criteria only in soil profiles most vulnerable to short-circuiting, such as those with gravel or fractured bedrock.

Importantly, LD 1550 also ensures that land suitable for septic systems under current standards won't be rendered unusable—striking a necessary balance between environmental protection and property rights.

This is a smart, forward-thinking measure. As Coastal Resource Manager, I know how critical water quality is to Brunswick's identity and economy. We are one of the state's most significant shellfish-producing communities, home to over 1,600 acres of intertidal mudflats spread along 61 miles of coastline. Shellfishing is not only an economic pillar, supporting local families and contributing to town revenues, but it is a vital part of our cultural heritage and our working waterfront.

Poor water quality resulting from nutrient pollution threatens that legacy. Shellfish harvest closures harm local livelihoods, degrade habitat, and place greater strain on already limited natural resources. Taking proactive steps now—such as those proposed in LD 1550—can help us avoid larger ecological and economic costs in the future.

These proposed changes to septic system standards are both reasonable and necessary. They are grounded in sound science and informed by real-world observations from communities like Brunswick that are on the front lines of coastal environmental change.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important legislation. I urge you to support LD 1550—for our ecosystems, for our shellfishermen, and for the future health of Maine's coastal waters.

Respectfully Submitted,

Daniel R. Devereaux

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