

May 5, 2025

Testimony of Kate Sykes, Portland City Councilor, District 5
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
In Support of LD 1870: An Act to Establish a Climate Superfund Cost Recovery Program to
Impose Penalties on Climate Polluters

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and honorable members of the Committee,

My name is Kate Sykes, and I am a Portland City Councilor representing District 5. I thank you for the opportunity to express my strong support for LD 1870, a bill that represents not only sound environmental policy but prudent fiscal governance. I ran for office on a platform committed to climate and economic justice, and I was elected to help lead our city through the growing financial challenges posed by the climate crisis.

The effects of climate change are no longer theoretical; they are a current and escalating cost center for local governments, taxpayers, and homeowners alike.

In our district, we are seeing increased basement flooding, higher insurance premiums, and property devaluation in flood-prone areas. These impacts disproportionately affect working-class families and renters, who are often least equipped to bear these added burdens.

Portland has been forced to accelerate capital investments in flood control and stormwater upgrades just to keep up with intensified weather patterns, undertaking major infrastructure investments to upgrade our stormwater systems, enhance flood control, and implement coastal resilience measures. These efforts are necessary, but they are expensive, and they underscore the urgency of incorporating climate projections into every layer of state and municipal policy.

In addition to flooding and storm damage, climate-related threats to Maine's ecosystems are manifesting in new and costly ways. In District 5, I've seen firsthand the spread of the emerald ash borer (EAB), an invasive pest whose survival and range are expanding with warming temperatures. A neighbor's tree is currently succumbing to infestation, and the City of Portland has had to increase capital spending to purchase additional tree removal equipment to address hazardous ash trees across the city. Beyond the steep labor and equipment costs, this loss of tree canopy reduces urban shade, weakens climate resilience, and undermines the aesthetic and ecological value of our neighborhoods.

LD 1870 asks the Department of Environmental Protection to do what any sound business would do: assess risk before making a decision. It ensures that environmental regulations consider long-term costs, which, if ignored, will ultimately land in the laps of municipalities, and by extension, Maine's property taxpayers.

We cannot afford to overlook the economic risks of climate change in our regulatory processes. I urge you to support this legislation as a responsible step toward safeguarding both our environment and our economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kate Sykes
Portland City Council, District 5