Testimony: LD 2141: *An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits* to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund

February 3, 2026

Dear Sen. Tepler and Rep. Doudera and Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Linda Bacon. I've been a Maine limnologist (lake ecologist) for more than 41 years and am a recent retiree from Maine DEP as the Lake Assessment Section leader.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding LD 2141. Because I'm travelling to Connecticut on the day of the hearing, I must submit testimony only in writing.

Maine lakes are precious jewels on our landscape. Because our state is blessed with so many lakes, most everyone has fond memories of swimming, boating or fishing on at least one or more of these inland bodies of water. My memories originate from Messalonskee Lake, just a few miles from Augusta.

Sadly, our lakes are at risk. Lake waters are warming due to changes happening in our regional climate, and our population is increasing - resulting in more development in all our watersheds. With development comes stormwater runoff, which carries pollutants including nutrients (especially phosphorus) to our lakes. Nutrients help our garden plants to grow – which we want, but they also fuel the growth of algae in our lakes. And warmer water causes algae to reproduce more quickly.

When swimming in our lakes, fortunately most often we can see into the water more than ten feet. When my children were young, I could sit on a dock and see exactly where they were at any time. When algal growth is heavy, the ability to see into the water is diminished considerably, which is a safety consideration. Webber Pond, also near Augusta, produces so much algae that when standing in water up to your knees, you may not be able to see your toes because the lake water is as thick as pea soup.

To add insult to injury, some algal populations produce nerve and liver toxins that can make people, pets and wildlife sick. We have quite a few lakes in the state that produce such toxins at various concentrations, but not as many as those in the southern part of the country.

Funding for the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund dried up in the early 1990s. In 1998 following the Great Ponds Task Force, legislation was passed to allocate annual funding for lake protection activities, including water quality tracking and a few positions at DEP and Soil & Water Conservation Districts, some of which have been repurposed. DEP's 'all other' funding allocation was cut by 10 % many years in a row during previous administrations such that there is not enough state money to fund our routine lake monitoring (lab costs have increased on average by 60% in recent years; phosphorus analysis that once cost $25/sample at HETL is now $45/sample). And the Federal funding that has been used to fill the gap, is now in question.

Other than Representative Bill Bridgeo's initiative to procure funds for alum treatments, no additional state funds have been dedicated specifically for the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund. Alum treatments are necessary to remediate lakes that turn green like pea soup, but such treatments are expensive and the amounts allocated cover only a fraction of the process.

And we all know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. So, protection efforts are essential for lakes moving forward.

I totally support LD 2141: *An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits* to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund.

I urge you to consider increasing the total, and to consider allocating an annual amount to the fund in future years.

Respectively,

Linda Bacon, Limnologist