



Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Legislative Director, Maine Conservation Alliance

in support of LD 2141, *An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund, the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program and Public Defender Office Staffing*

February 4, 2026

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and distinguished member of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,, my name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the Legislative Director at Maine Conservation Alliance, a statewide non-profit organization with 13,000 members and supporters that is building a just, thriving future for all by acting on the climate crisis, protecting the environment, and safeguarding our democracy. I am here today to testify on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) in support of LD 2141, *An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund, the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program and Public Defender Office Staffing*. The EPC is an inclusive statewide alliance of 41 conservation, climate action, and public health organizations. Each year we collectively identify a slate of policy priorities to act on the climate crisis, further environmental justice, protect land, water, and wildlife, and cultivate healthy Maine communities. LD 2141 is one of those priorities.

Protecting Maine's lakes and farmland for future generations is increasingly important. They are vital to our state. Healthy lakes support our outdoor recreation economy, municipal tax bases, drinking water supplies, and scenic landscape. Farmland is an important part of Maine's heritage, local food supply, and rural economy. Less than 5% of Maine's farmland is protected, the lowest percentage in New England and we continue to see degradation of our lakes across the state due to development pressures. We need to do more to conserve these important resources and funding is needed to do that. LD 2141 would utilize funds in the unclaimed

Maine would not be the only state to utilize funds from a bottle redemption program to help fund other programs. The National Conference of State Legislators reports that in Michigan, 75% of the funds in the unclaimed bottle deposit program are used for environmental programs. Massachusetts puts it back in the general fund and New York also utilizes 80% of it for their general funds. The amount in Maine's unclaimed bottle deposit fund fluctuates but generally is between \$10 and \$17 million dollars. You will hear from these large beverage companies that they need that money to help administer the program. PepsiCo's annual revenue in 2024 was \$91 billion dollars. Coca Cola's was \$46 billion. They do not need \$10M to help administer this program. And even if that were the case, LD 2141 does not utilize all of the money in the fund. It only utilizes \$4M to be split between the farmland and lakes programs. That would leave, depending on the balance of the fund, more than 60% of the fund left to help administer the program.

LD 2141 will provide a stable, annual source of funding for both the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and Working Farmland Access and Protection Program. The Lake Water Quality fund can be used for a variety of lake restoration projects including technical assistance, watershed surveys, watershed plan development, public education, and research focused on lake water quality restoration or protection. The funding is only to be used on lakes that have public access. The Farmland Access Fund provides protection to strategically significant working farmland properties whose continued availability to commercial agricultural businesses is essential to the long-term future of this sector of Maine's economy. DACF's Bureau of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources has a dedicated account within the Working Farmland Access and Protection Program to facilitate a rapid expansion of publicly funded farmland protection efforts. LD 2141 will benefit farms and lakes across the state, protecting these vital resources for generations to come. For these and many other reasons the 41 organizations in the EPC urge you to vote yes on LD 2141.

Thank you.