
To: Senator Curry, Representative Gere and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

From: Bradley Sawyer, Deputy Director

Date: February 17, 2026

Re: Testimony Neither For Nor Against L.D. 2173, An Act to Update the Laws Regarding Housing Developments and Accessory Dwelling Units

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development that you for your willingness to consider our testimony. The Maine Rural Water Association is a member-driven nonprofit organization based in Richmond, dedicated to providing training, technical assistance, and advocacy on behalf of our approximately three hundred members. The majority of our membership consists of water and wastewater utilities from across the state, all of whom are deeply committed to ensuring clean, safe drinking water and protecting the environment through the proper treatment of wastewater.

Subsurface wastewater disposal permitting has historically involved a significant municipal role under the framework established by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services and administered locally by Licensed Plumbing Inspectors. This structure reflects a longstanding balance between statewide technical standards and local oversight. Municipal officials are often most familiar with site-specific soil conditions, shoreline characteristics, high groundwater areas, and other environmental constraints that directly affect wastewater system performance. That local knowledge has been an important component of protecting public health and water quality across Maine communities.

To the extent this legislation modifies or centralizes aspects of subsurface wastewater permitting authority, we respectfully express concern about the potential loss of meaningful local control. Municipal review and oversight have traditionally provided an additional layer of scrutiny that is particularly important in environmentally sensitive areas, including shoreland zones and areas with marginal soils. While statewide consistency is valuable, changes to the current framework should be carefully evaluated to ensure that water quality protections are not inadvertently weakened and that local expertise remains integrated into the permitting process.

We want to be clear that we support efforts to advance responsible housing initiatives and recognize the importance of addressing Maine's housing needs. Our concern is not with promoting housing development, but with ensuring that such development proceeds in a manner that continues to safeguard drinking water supplies, surface waters, and groundwater resources. Protecting water quality—especially in sensitive areas—is fundamental to long-term community sustainability and public health.

We appreciate the Committee's thoughtful consideration of these issues and stand ready to work collaboratively to ensure that any changes maintain strong environmental protections while supporting Maine's broader policy goals.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this important issue. If you have any questions or concerns after this hearing, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at Bradley.Sawyer@MaineRWA.org or 207-737-9014.