

## **LD 1111 - An Act Concerning Contracts and Agreements for Large-Scale Water Extraction**

March 30th, 2023

Senator Lawrence, Representative Ziegler, members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee,

My name is Luke Sekera - Flanders, I come here from Orono, where I am studying Political Science at the University of Maine, but I grew up in Fryeburg, one of many communities whose circumstances should affirm the urgency of supporting the bill before you.

In 2012, our private water supplier entered an agreement with Poland Spring, allowing them to extract millions of gallons of groundwater for bottling and export for 45 years. Poland Spring secured this contract without the consent of the town's residents. My first time delivering a speech was at the PUC hearing on the contract, which only happened because of public outcry after the closed door negotiations were made known to the public.

Rather than making my acquaintance with state government in school, I have done so as a member of one of the communities it has failed to protect. As I said in the town hall a decade ago, under the conditions of the Fryeburg contract, I would not have a say in the matter until I am 54 years old.

Shortening the length of these contracts is reasonable and necessary. There is already a precedent in Maine state law for three year limits to these contracts. Watersheds do not begin and end at town lines, and the impacts of bulk water exports affect more than one community. We need our laws to better reflect scientific reality.

We can no longer afford to take these water sources for granted. Abundance alone is no justification to have anything but robust protections for groundwater and the people that depend on it. With climate change rapidly altering the condition of water sources and access worldwide, we don't know for sure where our region will stand in the coming decades. The crisis of PFAS contamination, which is rapidly growing in public awareness and urgency, adds further uncertainty. Already a quarter of the world's population does not have access to clean drinking water, and with current trends this number will rise. With these factors in mind, should we not be able to revisit these contracts frequently, in accordance with environmental well being and the needs of the community?

This is not about targeting a single company or industry. It is about protecting the water sources we rely on as more of the world faces strained access to drinkable water. It is about taking precaution with our lives' most important and delicate foundation. It is about the youth, and the many generations to follow whose capacity to live in peace and prosperity will be shaped by our actions, especially with such a vital element as water.

Thank you for hearing me today,

Luke Sekera - Flanders