

Monday, May 1, 2023

To: Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and Members of the Environment & Natural Resources Committee

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1473, An Act to Protect Certain Unfiltered Drinking Water Sources

My name is Julia Harper and I live in Lewiston. I am speaking as a mom and concerned taxpayer to urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD1473.

I’m an advocate for affordable water AND affordable housing.

I’m a member-owner of Raise-Op Housing Cooperative, an affordable housing organization owned and managed by its residents. Our members are painfully aware of the shortage of affordable homes, and thus as part of our mission, take part in affordable housing advocacy. We advocated for LD2003 last year, and were glad to see it pass. We also democratically manage our apartment buildings together, and observe how the cost of public water impacts the affordability of our homes, especially for our low-income residents.

Last year, I got involved when it became clear that the *quality* and *affordability* of our drinking water was at risk. The most urgent risk was proposed ordinance changes within the boundaries of Lake Auburn’s sensitive watershed that favored additional development, which would be exacerbated by LD2003. Right now, our water rates are some of the lowest in the state. As a result of development in the watershed, however, water rates for 40,000+ people, including my neighbors on low and fixed incomes, could more than double, and all taxpayers in our cities would see the mill rate rise to pay for a filtration plant as the cities are one of the largest water users.

There are less than 40 remaining drinking water sources left in the country that are clean enough to maintain filtration waivers, and nearly one quarter of these are in Maine.

A few weeks ago, the United Nations Secretary General said, “humanity’s survival will depend on how people manage water”. The U.N. had released a report showing that nearly half the world’s people will suffer severe water stress by 2023.

Of Maine’s 9 unfiltered drinking water sources that this legislation aims to protect, Lake Auburn may be the most currently at risk, however it is clearly a ‘canary in a coal mine’. All signs – including our changing climate – point to the fact that someday all these water sources will face a similar fate.

As an affordable housing advocate, I also want to address the claim that LD1473 will limit affordable housing. This bill addresses limited ecologically sensitive areas, and does little to limit the "affordable" housing provisions in LD2003. The primary way that LD2003 directly supports the creation of affordable housing is the "density bonus" for affordable housing projects in areas where a town has already zoned for multi-unit housing -- in those limited areas, developers can exceed the density limit for housing projects

that meet specific "affordability" criteria. In areas where multi-unit housing is NOT already allowed, however, there is nothing in LD2003 requiring the additional housing it allows to be 'affordable' OR for it to be used as a primary residence. Therefore, much of the new development allowed in these watersheds by LD2003 could end up, for example, as short term rentals utilized by folks who already have plenty of housing options. Housing can be built in many places - and I feel strongly that housing guaranteed to be affordable SHOULD be built in many places throughout the state – **however, watershed land that maintains drinking water quality and affordability is fixed and extremely threatened by housing development.**

Passing LD1473 is the right thing to do NOW for thousands of taxpayers and Maine's unique and precious drinking water. Together, let's ensure that additional housing does not come at the cost of finite, affordable drinking water.

I urge you to vote "Out to Pass" on LD1473. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

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