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Testimony of Rep. Bill Bridgeo introducing
LD 296, An Act to Appropriate Funds to the Department of Environmental Protection, Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund
Before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Good afternoon, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and distinguished colleagues of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Bill Bridgeo, and I represent House District 60, which is part of Augusta. I am here today to introduce and testify in support of **LD 296, An Act to Appropriate Funds to the Department of Environmental Protection, Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund.**

Two years ago, I began my quest to secure funding for a Department of Environmental Protection program that has been in existence for decades but had not had any funding since the 1980s. The purpose of the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund is to stimulate non-state financial support for worthy projects by providing matching state grants. This committee saw the wisdom of this investment and unanimously approved the bill at the level of $1 million in the first year of the current biennium and $1.5 million in the second. The bill went forward under the gavel and survived the gauntlet of the Appropriations Table, but alas, at the reduced amount of nothing in year one and $200,000 in year two.

Nevertheless, DEP program staff were elated that some funding had been injected into this long dormant program.

I began this quest when I was campaigning for the first time three years ago and learned that the large lake in my district –Togus Pond – had reached such a poor water quality level due to annual summer algae blooms that, at times, contact with that water posed a serious hazard to the health of both humans and their pets. People were desperate for some state help to enable an expensive, state-approved alum treatment to be applied over a two-year period to address the problem. The quoted cost was in the neighborhood of $800,000.

Once elected, I learned from our dedicated DEP staff that Togus Pond was one of twenty-five or so Great Ponds around the state that DEP classified as threatened due to the presence of algae blooms (with at least another twenty-five on their watch list). Others will testify to the importance of Maine's lakes and ponds to the character and economy of Maine, but I think we all

appreciate that our lakes have always been a treasured resource and protecting them should be a high priority for the state, its municipal subdivisions, local citizen associations and the public at large.

I'm not unaware of the tough budget challenges we face this year – this LD was submitted prior to the release of the Chief Executive's budget – and I defer to the judgment of this committee to land on the right approach and amount to go forward with, whether that's keeping the proposal as is; adopting something with a more modest amount; or perhaps seeking a one-time bond issue to be sent to the voters in the fall.

I learned the other day that DEP had issued an RFP statewide for grant applications to use the $200,000 available this year and that the Togus Pond Association, having raised $400,000 in donations last year for a first alum application and pledging to raise another $200,000 this year – and as the only applicant to meet the matching qualification – has been preliminarily approved to receive the funds. That's of course terrific for them, but more importantly, I think that it sends a message to dozens of groups around the state – should funds become available – that if they do the prep work then the state is prepared to partner with them. Let's remember that every lake or pond in Maine over ten acres is state property, and protecting their water quality is the right thing AND the smart thing to do.

Thank you for your support of this vital program. I am happy to answer any questions you have.