



February 12, 2025

**Testimony in Support of LD 296: An Act to Appropriate Funds to the Department of Environmental Protection, Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund**

Dear Chair Tepler, Chair Doudera, and Distinguished Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Alison Cooney, and I am the Executive Director for Lake Stewards of Maine (LSM) and I am writing in support of LD 296, which allocates \$4 million over the next two years to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund at the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). LSM is a statewide nonprofit that trains volunteer community scientists to collect credible data on lake health through our water quality monitoring and aquatic invasive species programs. We consider this bill an important investment and would like to highlight four key factors that deserve attention.

**Economic and Community Benefits:** Maine's lakes drive tourism, recreation, and property values, contributing over \$14 billion in net economic value. Recent peer-reviewed research in Maine shows a one-foot increase in water clarity correlates with a 1.1% rise in property values. Additionally, Maine's lakes generate at least \$2.1 billion annually in direct sales and expenditures, with total contributions exceeding \$3 billion. Investing in lake restoration today ensures the long-term success of these economic engines while distributing the responsibility beyond lakeshore residents.

**Science-Based Restoration:** DEP employs a rigorous, science-based approach to lake restoration. In-lake treatments, such as aluminum sulfate (alum), are only permitted if a 10-year Watershed Management Plan is implemented and sampling (often performed by our dedicated volunteers working with professional scientists) confirms that internal phosphorus loading accounts for at least 40% of the issue. These activities ensure that restoration efforts are both targeted and effective.

**Proven Success of Treatment:** In-lake treatments, like alum, significantly reduce phosphorus levels and improve water clarity, as demonstrated by extensive scientific research and successful projects. LSM has performed monitoring and support for four alum treatments – Lake Auburn (2019), Georges Pond (2020 & 2021), Long Pond (2022), and Togus Pond (2024) – all of which yielded dramatic improvements. The relief and joy expressed by these communities highlights the value of investment in restoration.

**The Cost of Inaction:** LSM has worked with hundreds of lake communities facing difficult water quality challenges. Many see their lakes changing but cannot afford restoration, leaving

them vulnerable to declining water quality, algal blooms (with public health risks), lost recreation, and lower property values. Legacy phosphorus – historic nutrient buildup unrelated to current residents – negatively impacts lake clarity, and upstream communities often unknowingly contribute to nutrient pollution. Local stewardship and fundraising is vital, but a broader, coordinated approach and support is needed. Maine's lakes are a public resource, protection and restoration should be supported.

LD 296 provides essential funding to safeguard Maine's economy, beauty, and public health. We urge the committee to invest in Maine's lakes today to ensure their protection and restoration for future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alison Cooney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Alison Cooney, LSM Executive Director  
alison@lakestewardsme.org