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Testimony of Representative Art Bell, before the Environment & Natural Resources Committee, introducing:

LD 646: Resolve, Establishing the Commission to Study How to Address Unregulated Stormwater Pollution

Good morning, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and distinguished colleagues of the Environment & Natural Resources Committee. My name is Art Bell, and I represent House District #103, Yarmouth.

Over the past several years we have all seen that Maine is becoming increasingly vulnerable to risks of polluted stormwater runoff and the damage from more intense rainstorms. Stormwater sheets off our landscapes and carries pesticides, fertilizer, debris and many other pollutants into our rivers, streams, lakes and ocean. Bacteria closes clam flats to harvesting and beaches to recreation; pollutants like PFAS limit fishing & threaten human health.

*The problem is increasing as new development around our State alters the natural ability of land to filter stormwater **AND** climate change produces more frequent and intense storms.*

I live on a coastal island in Casco Bay, nearby the Royal River. I see the effects of stormwater pollution when the river runs brown and rushes in a plume into Casco Bay, carrying any pollutants and sediments it picks up along the way. I love these waters and want them, and all Maine waters, to be healthy for my family, my constituents and all Mainers for generations to come.

This Resolve will be a practical way to identify next steps Maine can take to address stormwater pollution. This Resolve will build upon Maine's

Department of Environmental Protection “Stormwater Advisory Group” that has already begun strengthening Maine’s MS4 permitting regulations for our 30 most urban municipalities; and secondly addressing Chapter 500 rules that manage & mitigate stormwater from development of an acre or more in the rest of the State.

This bill proposes a legislative study commission that will answer questions designed to identify actionable measures Maine can implement to more fully regulate & mitigate stormwater pollution.

Specific questions to be addressed:

1. Identify actual & potential effects of stormwater pollution on public & environmental health, including fresh & marine species.
2. Compile scientific stormwater data to identify knowledge gaps that hinder the State’s ability to manage stormwater pollution.
3. Prioritize strategies for filling stormwater data knowledge gaps.
4. Recommend policies and tools to reduce sources of stormwater pollution from increasing urbanization and climate change; and
5. Identify barriers such as staffing and budget to properly address stormwater pollution.

Given the urgency of the problem, one might ask “Why a Resolve?” and not a bill to directly address these urgent concerns. The answer is simply that the information gathered by the broader scope of stakeholders in this study will augment data that the DEP has already compiled to enable the Legislature to consider informed actions in the second session of this 132nd session.

This Resolve creates a Stormwater Study Commission to build upon the work of the DEP’s Advisory Group’s work, and is consistent with “Maine Won’t Wait”, the State’s climate action plan.

LD 646 is an Environmental Priority Coalition top priority bill and is intended to be a bipartisan effort to ensure that all Mainer’s can depend upon clean water.