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LD 832: RESOLVE, TO ALLOCATE FUNDS TO REDUCE THE DEBT OF THE VASSALBORO SANITARY DISTRICT.

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and the distinguished members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Dick Bradstreet. I represent Senate District 15, which includes Augusta, Belgrade, China, Mount Vernon, Sidney and my home town of Vassalboro, and I'm here today to present LD 832, a *Resolve, to Allocate Funds to Reduce the debt of the Vassalboro Sanitary District.*

First, a little bit of history: Several years ago, the septic system of the Vassalboro Sanitary District failed, and the District was forced to find a new method of disposing of septic waste. After searching through several options, the logical choice was to connect to the system that Winslow uses. Upon getting pricing and arranging financing, the VSD was hit with the perfect storm. I'd like to point out here that when I worked with the Department of Environmental Protection, which helped oversee the project, I found out that the proposal was right at the very top of the affordability metrics, which in itself was a daunting challenge for a District that has just 223 users. Then, as the project was underway, COVID hit and all pricing skyrocketed. The costs ended up way over budget, but at that point in time there was no turning back.

The project has been completed, some grant funding was provided and the Town of Vassalboro has pitched in to help as best it can, but there still remain two loans which were a little over \$2 million dollars each. Even though the interest rates on the loans are low, the repayment amounts that are passed onto the users in many cases exceed their real estate taxes. It is an untenable situation.

I approached the Governor's office seeking help, and was directed to the DEP in hopes there would be unused funds from other projects that could be transferred to help the VSD. The people there were very helpful, but unfortunately there were no such funds, and I also learned that once a project is funded, there is virtually no chance to go back and request more funds. I also contacted the office of Senator Collins, and I believe there is hope that some federal monies will be coming in the next fiscal year, but in all probability, if there are any, the amount will probably not exceed around \$250,000 – way too little to provide real relief to the District. I should also point out that the Vassalboro Sanitary District is an independent entity and not a part of the Town of Vassalboro.

As you may well imagine, this dilemma is causing a lot of stress to those who are tied into the VSD. The costs are impoverishing many of the users, who are having a horrible time trying to make ends meet. Several are older people on fixed incomes, and there is just no way they can continue down this road. I understand that many of them may be facing foreclosure due to the fact that they can't pay all their bills, including their property taxes. Nobody is interested in buying their homes once they find out the monthly amount of the sewer bill, and nobody will purchase land to build a home that could be tied into the system, because the costs would be so exorbitant. To add to their woes, Winslow is looking to upgrade their system and the result of that will be even higher usage fees passed on to the VSD users.

I know this is an unusual request and I would not be making it if the situation were not so dire. I asked for the \$2 million dollars in hopes that one of the loans could be paid off. Even after that, the remaining costs will still be

very high, but at least there would be light at the end of the tunnel for these fellow Mainers. I do realize that many of our citizens are having a difficult time in making ends meet – housing that is affordable, paying for heat, feeding their families and a host of other challenges. But for most of those people, there are programs that help provide for what they need. For the people of the Vassalboro Sanitary District, there is none of that, and their only legitimate hope is that you will vote this bill out as “Ought to Pass,” and that is what I hope you will do. The people who are suffering from this could certainly use a little good news. Thank you for your time.

Senator Dick Bradstreet