



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



MELANIE LOYZIM
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY OF
MELANIE LOYZIM, COMMISSIONER
MAINE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

SPEAKING IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 25

**AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE A GENERAL FUND BOND ISSUE TO FUND
WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITY PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION OF
INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS**

SPONSORED BY SENATOR BRENNER

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS**

DATE OF HEARING:

April 10, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, I am Melanie Loyzim, Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, speaking in support of L.D. 25.

The Department proposed this bond initiative to help municipal wastewater treatment plants manage sludge. There are 150 municipal and quasi-municipal wastewater treatment facilities in Maine (often referred to as publicly owned treatment works or POTWs). POTWs treat wastewater from our homes and businesses so that it can be safely discharged into our rivers and marine waters. These facilities are located throughout our state, from our largest cities to some of our smallest towns. POTWs protect water quality and public health, and support our economy. In one way or another, all Maine citizens benefit from this important infrastructure.

AUGUSTA
17 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0017
(207) 287-7688 FAX: (207) 287-7826

BANGOR
106 HOGAN ROAD, SUITE 6
BANGOR, MAINE 04401
(207) 941-4570 FAX: (207) 941-4584

PORTLAND
312 CANCO ROAD
PORTLAND, MAINE 04103
(207) 822-6300 FAX: (207) 822-6303

PRESQUE ISLE
1235 CENTRAL DRIVE, SKYWAY PARK
PRESQUE ISLE, MAINE 04769
(207) 764-0477 FAX: (207) 760-3143

Sludge is an unavoidable byproduct of wastewater treatment, made up of solids that settle out of the wastewater. Historically, most of Maine's sludge was directly applied as a soil amendment on hay or corn land, or composted, to utilize its nutrient value and organic matter. This has been a common practice across the country.

Unfortunately, we have discovered that sludge contains per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) from all of our homes and businesses. Land application of sludge has caused more than 500 wells and properties in Maine to have PFAS levels that exceed health-based thresholds. As a result of this contamination, the practice of using sludge and composted sludge for its agronomic value was banned in Maine in 2022.

Now, the majority of the 88,500 wet tons of sludge produced annually by Maine POTWs is placed in Maine landfills. After using belt filter presses, centrifuges, and/or screw presses, this sludge retains a moisture content of 70-85%. Safely landfilling this wet material requires mixing with dry, bulky wastes, multiplying by up to 8 times the amount of dwindling landfill space that is consumed. Tipping fees for sludge have increased drastically since 2022, forcing POTWs to increase sewer rates and creating a great deal of uncertainty and concern amongst POTWs regarding long-term options for sludge disposal.

The Department proposed L.D. 25 to provide funding for POTWs for a very specific purpose - to purchase dryers, digesters, or other technologies that can reduce the moisture content of sludge enough to reduce or eliminate the need to bulk sludge when it is landfilled. This will save landfill space, reduce the volume and weight of sludge when it is transported (also reducing transportation emissions), and will make sludge easier to handle if its agronomic use is ever permitted again in the future. This bond is not intended to treat or remove PFAS; there are other efforts for that purpose already underway. We have an immediate need to reduce the amount of sludge we produce and we cannot do that by defecating less.

L.D. 25 - An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Fund Wastewater Treatment Facility Planning and Construction of Infrastructure Projects
Testimony of: Melanie Loyzim - DEP
Public Hearing: 4/10/25
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I ask for your support for LD 25, and am happy to answer any questions you may have now or at work session. Thank you.