



Testimony in Support of LD 25, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Fund Wastewater Treatment Facility Planning and Construction of Infrastructure Projects

Before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Luke Frankel, Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director

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Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is Maine's leading nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting the environment on behalf of our nearly 20,000 supporters statewide and beyond. I am here today to testify in support of LD 25, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Fund Wastewater Treatment Facility Planning and Construction of Infrastructure Projects.

Since the discovery of PFAS on dairy farms in 2016, Maine has been a leader in regulating PFAS contamination in the environment and providing support for impacted industries. This has come in the form of several innovative actions taken by the Legislature through the years, including funding statewide testing to identify contamination, appropriating \$60 million to support impacted farmers in 2021, and banning the land application of wastewater sludge in 2022. These actions have been instrumental in protecting key industries, public health, and the environment from the consequences of PFAS contamination.

One side effect of the 2022 sludge land application ban, however, has been increased hardship for wastewater treatment plants that still need to dispose of their sludge somewhere. With land application off the table, this sludge is taken to landfills for disposal. Due to the heavy and clay-like nature of the sludge, its increased disposal volume in recent years has created a problem for landfills that now need to bring in more solid waste to balance this unstable material. Increasing the overall volume of solid waste directed to landfills can lead to other negative environmental impacts, and this situation has made it more expensive for wastewater treatment facilities, that are funded in part by taxpayer dollars, to dispose of their sludge.

LD 25 aims to address this domino effect of negative impacts by providing an additional source of funding for municipalities and quasi-municipal entities to better handle their sludge. There are technologies designed to decrease sludge volume and make it more stable for landfills in the form of digesters and dryers; however, these critical pieces of infrastructure are currently too expensive for wastewater treatment facilities operating on tight budgets. The \$50 million bond proposed in this bill will provide critical funding for these plants to address one of their principal concerns.

In Maine, we are known for our clean water. In 2023, our lakes, rivers, and beaches helped to attract more than 15 million visitors to the state, who contributed more than \$9 billion to Maine's

economy.¹ Well-operating wastewater treatment plants are key ingredients to how we protect water quality in Maine, and as a result, any investment in wastewater treatment facilities is an investment in our tourism economy.

Like we have already done for agriculture, Maine should continue to be a leader in supporting key industries impacted by PFAS contamination. Right now, it is wastewater treatment facilities that are bearing the brunt of our PFAS problem and need our support. For this reason, we encourage the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 25. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Maine Office of Tourism: https://motpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/MOT_GovCon_HighlightSheet_2023_Printed-Paper_FNL-0430.pdf