



LD 1563, “An Act to Establish Content Standards for Legislation”

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April 28, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

My name is Laurel Libby, and I represent House District 90, North Auburn and Minot. I am pleased to introduce LD 1563, “An Act to Establish Content Standards for Legislation.” I come before you out of a deep commitment to the principles of open government, public trust, and civic engagement — values that have long been the foundation of Maine’s democratic tradition.

The legislation before you seeks to address the troubling and increasingly common practice of introducing “concept drafts” — bills filed without specific legislative text — a process that diminishes transparency, limits public engagement, and ultimately undermines confidence in our government. By requiring that bills be introduced with full and complete language, this bill would take a major step forward in restoring integrity to the legislative process and strengthening the public’s ability to engage meaningfully with the work done in their name.

Concept drafts, while originally intended to provide flexibility in the face of complex policy challenges, have too often become a loophole allowing vague, ill-defined proposals to advance through the legislative process without proper scrutiny. Without full text, citizens, advocates, and even lawmakers are left guessing about a bill’s true

intent and impact. This lack of clarity prevents robust debate and deprives the people of Maine of their rightful opportunity to participate fully in shaping the laws that govern their lives.

We have seen the negative consequences of concept drafts firsthand. During the 131st Legislature, LD 227 was introduced as a broad concept draft, but a 20+ page amendment was released to the committee at the end of the week prior to the public hearing. Neither that amendment, nor the final 17 page amendment, were posted to the legislature's website until the day LD 227 came up for a vote in the House. Maine people were left entirely in the dark, aside from an amendment posted via google file.

This example is not isolated, though it is one of the most egregious. It reveals a larger, systemic issue: when full legislative language is delayed or hidden, the very people who should have the greatest voice in the process — ordinary Mainers — are too often the ones left out.

It is true that in response to growing public concern, the Legislature has recently amended its **Joint Rules** to require additional information when concept drafts are submitted. This is a welcome acknowledgement that the system was falling short. However, with all due respect, **a rule change is not enough**. Joint Rules are internal agreements — they can be suspended, waived, or rewritten at any time. They do not carry the force, permanence, or enforceability of statute. They are, by their nature, subject to the political winds of the moment.

If transparency is truly a principle we value — not just a procedural preference — it must be enshrined in law. Only by placing clear requirements for full legislative language into statute can we guarantee that this protection for Maine's citizens can not be rolled back. Statutory clarity ensures that the public's right to know is not contingent on the discretion of any particular leadership, committee, or moment in time. It becomes a permanent part of how we do business in Maine — as it should be.

Other states have recognized the need for such structural protections. **New Hampshire** requires that bills be introduced with full text, ensuring that even the most complex issues are subject to early and open scrutiny. **Vermont** similarly demands that legislation be properly drafted before introduction, with committees often refusing to act on vague or incomplete proposals. At the federal level, the **72-hour public posting**

rule was adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives to prevent last-minute surprises and to foster more informed public debate. In each of these examples, transparency is not left to chance — it is built into the process itself.

Maine should be no different. We are rightly proud of our open town meetings, our citizen-led ballot initiatives, and our culture of direct, participatory democracy. Yet the current widespread use of concept drafts undercuts those very traditions by concealing important details from the public and delaying meaningful engagement. This legislation represents a return to our roots — a commitment that the people of Maine deserve to see and understand the laws proposed on their behalf, from the very beginning.

By passing LD 1563, the Legislature has the opportunity to strengthen public trust, enhance civic participation, and improve the quality of our lawmaking process. Transparency does not slow good policy; it sharpens it. Public input does not hinder progress; it legitimizes it. Open government is not an obstacle to success — it is the only way to achieve it sustainably and honorably.

For these reasons, I respectfully and strongly urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1563. The people of Maine deserve a legislative process that is open, honest, and fully accountable — today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and careful attention.