



Solutions for a
Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, Defend Our Health
In Support of LD 1696, "A Resolve, to Study Maine's Absolute Dominion and Beneficial Use
Laws Relating to Water Rights"
Before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee
April 29, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the vice president of policy and advocacy for Defend Our Health. Defend Our Health's mission is to make sure that everyone has equal access to safe food and drinking water, healthy homes and products that are toxic-free and climate friendly. I am here to testify in support of LD 1696, "A Resolve, to Study Maine's Absolute Dominion and Beneficial Use Laws Relating to Water Rights."

Maine is uniquely water-rich state, and we need to make sure that we have a policy framework in place for our shared water systems, one that takes into consideration current demands on shared water systems, contamination due to toxics such as PFAS, climate change pressures, and the public's expectation for fair and sustainable water governance.

This resolve is a timely and necessary step toward evaluating how Maine's current legal structure does or does not support the state's goals of environmental protection, public health, agricultural vitality, tribal sovereignty, and economic development. It creates a broad-based, commission to engage in a thoughtful and inclusive process.

We appreciate that the framework of the commission created under this law includes a broad swath of experts, legislators, impacted community members and tribal representatives. This ensures a comprehensive examination of the issues from multiple perspectives and builds upon the 2021 study on water as a resource and avoids duplication of effort. It also requires looking at other state models, allowing us to take lessons learned from other states and incorporate them into this work.

As water becomes an increasingly contested resource globally and regionally, Maine has an opportunity to lead. This Resolve will allow the state to put forth a clear and equitable framework that will provide certainty to businesses, protect ecosystems, honor tribal sovereignty, and safeguard public health access to a life-sustaining resource.

I urge the committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1696 and to ensure that the commission can carry out this essential work.