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LD 1382: An Act Regarding Dam Repair

To: Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

Hello Senators and Representatives,

LUCY
LEAF

I adamantly support this bill which will help fund dam repair and reconstruction in Maine. But I also want to propose that we can do better than just repairing aging dams.

You have testimony from my lake association in Hancock County, the Toddy Pond Association, as we are facing a dam crisis right now. You will hear a lot about how important lakes are to Maine and the people who visit here, as well as all things lake property owners already do to keep their lakes clean for everyone to use. But, as you know, aging dams throughout Maine are becoming safety issues, driving maintenance costs up and when towns are no longer able or willing to take on those costs, it falls to the lake property owners

Maine is not alone with this issue. Wisconsin has even more lakes than Maine, spread out in rural areas, like Maine. In the 1970s they enacted legislation that allowed lake property owners to essentially tax themselves to cover the costs of maintaining water quality and dams. Property owners had to choose to do this, but to make it more enticing, the state created a revolving fund to offer loans just as you are looking at here. Wisconsin now has over 250 lake districts managed by lake property owners and a lake extension service to help them do it.

Maine has legislation now in place to apply something similar to our particular crisis, but key to that is making funding or at least financing, available. Lake communities are mostly seasonal residents, the least equipped to manage dams safely, but that's where we are now. Lake property owners love their lake, usually shared by others, and we will do what it takes to keep them watered and healthy. But we can't do it alone.

Besides funding being crucial to the Maine we know, I'd like to share today why I think this fund is a good investment for Maine. I am concerned as any of us about throwing money at aging deteriorating dams that could easily fail with the next extreme weather event. But I'm heartened to learn about the innovative engineering solutions already in place, many right here in Maine, called rock ways or ripple dams, that impound water to maintain the lake as we know it, but provide more resilience to extreme weather. They also require little maintenance once in place. Every lake situation is different, but these possibilities not only give me hope for a good solution for a healthier lake all around, but a result a community can be proud of.

I hope that the state can help lake owners and small towns as well, in this fight to save our lakes- for everyone to use and enjoy.

Lucy Leaf
Ellsworth, Maine