

Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 1904: An Act to Establish the Municipal Shoreline  
Protection Legal Fund

***Submitted to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee***

*May 12, 2025*

Good morning, Chair Tepler, Chair Gramlich, and Distinguished Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

My name is Sarah Nichols and I am delivering this testimony on behalf of Maine Lakes, the Lakes Environmental Association, and the 30 Mile River Watershed Association, lake conservation groups with thousands of members, volunteers, and supporters across the state who care deeply about the future health of our lakes.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to speak in support of LD 1904.

Our shoreland zoning laws were created to protect the health of our lakes. One of the many ways they do that is by ensuring that there is only minimal disturbance to natural vegetation along the shoreline. That natural vegetation ensures that rain is both intercepted and absorbed into the ground and significantly reduces nutrient pollution. Nutrient pollution, primarily too much phosphorus in lake water, feeds excess algae growth, which in turn creates a "bloom". You might have seen (or smelled) the results of an algae bloom. Stagnant, green water that is not pleasant (or safe) for humans or wildlife.

Violating shoreland zoning laws by smoothing large areas to plant lawns along the shore, cutting legacy trees and shrubs that provide shade and erosion benefits, and removing ground cover ensures that more rain, and more nutrient pollution, will flow from a property into the water.

While most homeowners and developers comply with our shoreland zoning laws, it just takes one violation to cause significant environmental harm that affects water quality, habitat, and property values, and also to create far-reaching impacts to lake users, recreationists, homeowners, community members, and wildlife. While the state sets and mandates lake protection regulations in the shoreland zone, the responsibility for enforcement falls primarily on municipalities. Shoreland zoning violations can be lengthy and costly for municipalities,

sometimes forcing them to give up on enforcement when the violator has abundant resources and practiced legal teams.

LD 1904 will help municipalities by creating a fund that they can tap into when facing financial hardship due to the enforcement of shoreland zoning violations. The fund is an important tool to help municipalities as they continue to identify and pursue shoreland zoning violations. As a revolving fund, money that has been borrowed will be paid back, creating a sustainable financial resource for towns across the state to count on in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for our support of LD 1904.