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Testimony of Representative Holly B. Stover presenting

LD 1914, An Act To Protect Sole Source Aquifer Municipalities While Implementing Housing Density Laws

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Representative Holly Stover, and I am honored to represent House District 48. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today as the sponsor of **LD 1914, An Act To Protect Sole Source Aquifer Municipalities While Implementing Housing Density Laws**.

LD 1914 is not about whether Maine should increase housing density to address our housing crisis. That work is already underway, and I fully support thoughtful, statewide action to expand housing access. However, one-size-fits-all policies must be applied with caution in areas where environmental constraints pose serious risks to public health. That is the intent of LD 1914: to responsibly balance Maine's housing goals with the need to protect vulnerable drinking water supplies in certain coastal and island communities.

This bill creates a narrowly tailored and commonsense exemption for what we define as sole source aquifer municipalities—communities located wholly or partially on a peninsula or island that rely on a primary drinking water supply from a sole source aquifer, as designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In these areas, contamination may result from overdevelopment, septic system failure or saltwater intrusion, which we see most frequently. Any of these could be catastrophic. The drinking water cannot be easily replaced or imported, and public health would be at serious risk. LD 1914 does not provide a blanket or permanent exemption from the housing laws outlined in Title 30-A, Sections 4364 to 4364-C. Instead, it ensures that, before municipalities are required to allow increased housing density, a licensed geologist with expertise in hydrogeology must

determine whether the area's groundwater and septic systems can safely support such development.

The bill outlines a clear and evidence-based process for evaluation and reporting. If the geologist's findings indicate that an area can accommodate greater density, the municipality must comply with the applicable housing laws—but only to the extent supported by the evaluation. If the findings demonstrate that the area cannot safely support increased density, the municipality remains exempt for that area.

This approach is measured, science-based and grounded in the unique geological realities of Maine's island and peninsula communities. Many of these areas have fractured bedrock, thin soils and close proximity to saltwater—factors that require additional scrutiny before increasing development.

LD 1914 also directs the Department of Economic and Community Development and the Department of Environmental Protection to adopt rules for implementation. DECD will establish timelines and compliance standards, while DEP will ensure that municipalities engage qualified geologists to conduct the necessary evaluations.

In closing, I want to emphasize: LD 1914 is not a roadblock to housing development. It is a safeguard designed to give small, rural, coastal communities the time and technical support they need to make informed decisions that protect public health and drinking water.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support LD 1914 and to ensure that Maine's housing policy reflects both our housing needs and our environmental responsibilities.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions.