

Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
Testimony of Robert A. Burgess
In Support of
LD1934 – An Act to Promote Responsible Outdoor Lighting

Dear Senator Baldacci and Representative Salisbury:

My name is Robert Burgess and I am Immediate Past President of Southern Maine Astronomers and a Board Member of Dark Sky Maine. I have been involved in efforts to educate about, and reduce, light pollution for nearly twenty years.

SMA was formed in 2004 to share our interest in astronomy and space science with fellow enthusiasts and to educate the public about the wonders of the universe. We do this through presentations to schools and civic groups and through public stargazing sessions. Over the years our all-volunteer organization has touched more than 20,000 members of the public through these free events. One of our missions is to promote the responsible use of outdoor lighting and we preach that gospel at all our events.

Since you will no doubt hear the concerning statistics and scientific impact of light pollution from others, I would like to make just three points for you to consider as you evaluate this bill.

First, a very basic observation: every living thing on planet Earth evolved under a world of light and dark and adapted to it. It's only since 1879, with the invention of the electric light bulb, that we have been spilling excess light into places that previously were dark at night. Science is showing us that in doing so we are inadvertently disrupting delicate ecological balances with consequences we are only starting to appreciate. We've all heard about the decrease in insect life, including many pollinators. LD1934 seeks to limit that impact by establishing sensible standards for outside lighting.

Second, I've served on the Brunswick Planning Board for the last seven years. In that time we have considered dozens of applications for commercial, industrial and residential development. While our ordinance has several features that help control light pollution, it lacks a limit on the color temperature of fixtures that can limit glare and light scattering. In each case our board has asked applicants to limit the color temperature of their outside lighting to 3000Kelvin or less and every single applicant has obliged. This bill sets a 3000K limit. In short, we are not breaking new ground here.

The model ordinance that LD1934 directs the Department of Administrative and Financial Services to develop would be a huge benefit to towns and their planning boards.

Finally, the Land Use Planning Commission recently updated its outdoor lighting standards for the 10.4 million acres of Maine that it oversees. We, along with many other organizations, participated in those proceedings. What LUPC adopted contains the same or very similar standards to those being established in LD1934.

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