

Testimony of Benjamin Wright, Superintendent, North Jay Water District
In Support of LD 2041, **An Act to Eliminate the Debt Limit of the North Jay Water District**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
January 20, 2026

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and Honorable Members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee,

My name is Benjamin Wright. I am the Superintendent of the North Jay Water District. I have been in this position for three years. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of LD 2041, An Act to Eliminate the Debt Limit of the North Jay Water District and thank you to Representative Lyman for sponsoring this bill.

The goal of the North Jay Water District is to eliminate the current debt limit of \$900,000 from our charter so the District can borrow money to fund an estimated eleven-million-dollar infrastructure project to replace the water main. It was during the planning phase for the project that we realized the debt limit is an obstacle.

To provide some history and context: the North Jay Water District was incorporated in 1947 to provide a public water supply to the village of North Jay. The North Jay Water District, Jay Village Water District and Livermore Falls Water Districts are all independent utilities that serve different areas of the Town of Jay. They are each governed by the Public Utilities Commission and their own individual boards of trustees.

When incorporated, the North Jay Water District was authorized to borrow \$100,000. That limit has been increased over time, from \$500,000 in 1967 and to \$900,000 in 2003.¹ However, the debt limit of \$900,000 is not a realistic number to take on the type of infrastructure project necessary to update the public water supply. Notably, Jay Village Water District has already had its debt limit eliminated by legislative amendment. That was in 1969.²

The North Jay Water District water main needs to be fully replaced. It is old, dating back to the 1940s, and it is made of low-grade asbestos and copper pipes. As a result, the District has experienced and repaired fifteen breaks, including six water main breaks in the last three years.

Each water main break creates significant public health risks. There is the potential for bacteria and for possibly harmful fibers or particles to enter the public drinking water supply. Each time the water main breaks, as recently happened in June of last year, residents experience a lack of water and often live under a boil water order during the repair period.

¹ P. & S.L. 1967, c. 215; 2003, c. 10.

² P. & S.L. 1969, c. 20.

Each water main break also creates an expensive construction emergency for the District. Locating emergency crews to work on State Route 4 is costly and not something that can always be done quickly. In the last two years, the District has spent just under \$200,000 on emergency repairs and paving.

The District was planning to do a water main replacement project in 2026. However, because of the \$900,000 debt limit, the District will not be able to borrow money for this project through the Maine Bond Bank Drinking Water State Revolving Loan program as planned, or any other lender, until the debt limit is resolved. The original plan was for the engineers to bid the project in December of 2025. Now the plan is for engineers to delay bidding the project until it is clear the District can borrow the money. Other local water districts have completed similar infrastructure projects and that our infrastructure of the North Jay Water District is among the oldest in our region.

The North Jay Water District is ultimately accountable to its customers. We do not take lightly the prospect of borrowing for this project. We do know the project needs to be done and that the \$900,000 debt limit is a barrier.

I respectfully request that you support this legislation to eliminate the debt limit in the North Jay Water District Charter so we can borrow the money and begin replacement of the water main. I will do my best to address any questions should they arise.

Thank you for your consideration.