



February 4, 2026

RE: Testimony in Support of LD 2141 – “An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund, the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program and Public Defender Office Staffing.”

Dear Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Tristan Taber, and I am the Water Quality Program Director for Lake Stewards of Maine (LSM), a statewide nonprofit dedicated to protecting Maine’s lakes since 1971. LSM trains and supports volunteer community scientists who collect credible data on lake health through our Water Quality Monitoring and Aquatic Invasive Species programs. With more than 1200 trained volunteers monitoring over 500 lakes across the state, LSM plays a key role in helping the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) track and manage lake conditions. Our volunteers are especially vital in reporting degradation of water quality and early detection of aquatic invasive species.

LSM is a founding member of the statewide Lake Protection Coalition and serves on its steering committee alongside five other lake organizations. We are united in support of LD 2141, which is critical to the future of lake water quality in the State of Maine.

Effective lake protection depends on consistent, long-term, high-quality data. This data is collected by trained LSM volunteers - who gather more than 85% of lake monitoring data statewide - along with DEP scientists and professional monitoring staff. The DEP relies on this information to assess lake health, determine compliance with state water quality standards, and guide management decisions. With more than 6,000 lakes across Maine and limited resources, collecting sufficient monitoring data remains a significant challenge. Because changes in lake conditions often occur gradually, reliable trends may take several years to detect. Without sustained investment in monitoring and analysis, Maine risks losing its ability to identify problems early, when solutions are most effective and affordable.

Maine is fortunate to have many dedicated lake stewards and organizations working to protect our waters. However, much of this activity is concentrated in southern Maine. Many rural and under-resourced communities lack the funding, staff capacity, and volunteer base needed to participate fully in lake monitoring and stewardship activities. In some areas, the challenge is not only funding, but also a limited population available to do the work.

As a result, important lakes in these regions are often under-monitored, creating gaps in the statewide data that DEP relies on to track lake health and guide management decisions. When monitoring gaps exist, Maine is less able to detect problems early and respond before conditions worsen. These gaps limit Maine’s ability to detect problems early and respond effectively.

Consistent investment and strong partnerships are essential to ensure that all communities, not just the wealthiest or most populated, have the tools and resources needed to protect Maine's shared waters. With focused support, under-resourced communities could play a much stronger role in protecting their lakes. Investments in outreach and education, volunteer recruitment, expanded training and technical assistance, and funding for additional DEP field staff would help close these monitoring gaps. Strengthening lake monitoring in rural Maine will improve statewide data, support early intervention, and ensure that all of Maine's lakes, not just those in well-resourced areas, are protected for future generations.

For these reasons, and others described by coalition members, I respectfully urge you to vote **Ought to Pass on LD 2141**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

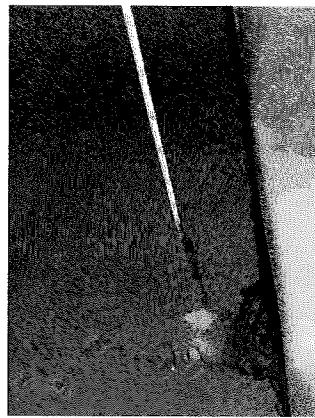
Sincerely,



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The images above show the simple, effective equipment our volunteers use to monitor lake health through water clarity. This includes a Secchi disk, viewing scope, and measuring tape. Volunteers are trained to use these tools to collect consistent, high-quality water quality data that helps track long-term changes in Maine's lakes.