



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

*Submitted to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee
February 4, 2026*

Good afternoon, Chair Tepler, Chair Doudera, and Distinguished Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of LD 1241.

My name is Susan Gallo, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Lakes. Our membership organization includes more than 6,000 supporters and volunteers, including individual members as well as over 90 Lake Association members. We are dedicated to our mission of promoting, protecting, and enhancing lake water quality, and of preserving the ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits of Maine's lakes for all Maine people.

We enthusiastically support funding both the lake fund at DEP and the working farmland fund at DACF at the proposed level of \$2 million dollars each per year.

The scope and scale of work that needs to be done to protect the quality of Maine's lakes is far beyond available funding and program capacity.

Another example of unmet needs to add to the long list you've already heard about today is the need for Best Management Practices (BMPs) to control sources of nonpoint source pollution which degrade water quality and feed algae blooms.

LD 2141 could provide staff capacity and a matching grant program to help overcome the known barriers to BMP installation of cost and lack of technical expertise. I've

included a table below showing the number and costs of BMPs recommended to homeowners by our LakeSmart program over the last 13 years.

For a relatively small amount of money, a matching grant program could give homeowners the support they need to install hundreds of BMPs each year; engage dozens of lake associations, regional watershed organizations, and other community partners; leverage additional private funding; and most importantly protect valuable public resources.

BMP Recommendations by the LakeSmart Program at Maine Lakes		
Year(s)	# of BMPs	Estimated Installation Costs (\$800 per BMP)
2025 (actual)	1,411	\$1,128,800
2013-2024 (estimate)	~12,000	\$9,600,000

Funding lake protection is a wise investment

A recent University of Maine study put an annual value on our Great Ponds (lakes over 10 acres in size) at \$14.4 billion (See attached “Let’s Be Clear” document and visit www.lakes.me/valuing-lakes FMI).

An investment of \$2 million each year is a tiny fraction of this value, just over 1%, that will pay off many times over by improving lake resiliency and long-term health.

LD 2141 can fund proactive work to keep our lakes clean and healthy before they become impaired, a much more cost-effective path than waiting until lakes need large-scale and expensive remediation.

LD 2141 can help us spend money in the short-term in order to save much more money in the long-term, a true Maine value if there ever was one.

There is widespread public support for this bill.

Almost 2,000 people have signed on support letters for this bill, and, over 80 supporters have taken the time to submit written testimony online. Supporters of this bill are everyday Mainers who work hard to keep our land and lakes healthy and who recognize the value of farms and lakes to our state’s identity and natural heritage.

Please note there is no opposing testimony online, and I am guessing the only opposition you’ll hear today will be from beverage industry lobbyists.

The lakes community can offer valuable assistance in developing a strong framework for disbursing funds generated by LD 2141.

The lakes community is a valuable resource for DEP. We organize and support thousands of volunteers across the state. We provide technical support and millions in matching funds for lake protection projects each year. We are essential partners.

We ask the committee to discuss ideas for building a framework and process for disbursing Lake Water Quality funds that includes community partnerships and a process for public input. There are many exiting models in state government and I encourage you to discuss the options with DEP. We are happy to provide additional information about this at the work session.

Finally, unredeemed bottle deposits should go toward projects that benefit the public.

Even with one of the highest recycling rates in the country, Maine's unredeemed bottle deposits total about \$16 million each year. This is money from consumers that should be given back to support public resources.

While we understand some of this money should (and does) support DEP, putting a small fraction of the remaining funds toward clean water and farmland protection benefits the Maine consumers who paid the deposits in the first place.

I cannot stress empahctically enough that the clear, blue lakes you see today are not the lakes you, or your grandchildren or your great grandchildren, will see in the future. You have the power today to act on behalf of the people of Maine, to redirect public funds to public resources, and to provide critical, sustained funding that protects lakes and farms far into the future.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.