

Art Bell
Maine House District #47

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and fellow members of the Joint Standing on Environment & natural Resources. My name is Art Bell, and I represent House District #47, comprising of Yarmouth, Chebeague & Long Island.

I am here today to introduce LD 1488 ... "A Resolve, To study & Recommend Improvements to Maine's Dam Safety."

History tells us that the citizens of my home community of Yarmouth, like many of the other early Maine settlements, chose to settle where they did because of the proximity to fresh flowing water ... in our case, the Royal River. Over the nearly 400 years since, the Royal River has been loyal partner to the citizens of Yarmouth ... providing fresh water & fish for sustenance, power for the many mills that appeared over the years, and even hydro-electricity. But the dams that were built back in the 18th & 19th centuries no longer serve their original purpose, and today, many of these dams are simply damaging the environment and ecology of their respective watersheds. And as they are no longer in use, they are aging with neglect, slowly deteriorating.

Across the State of Maine there are over 1,000, many of which are like our dams in the Royal River. When we view this inventory of aging dams thru the lens of climate change, we realize that we have a growing public safety issue. In December of 2020, the Maine Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers released its 2020 Report Card for Maine's Infrastructure. The Report grades 16 major categories using a simple "A to F" scale, examining current condition & needs, as well as making recommendations for improvements. Overall Maine's infrastructure received a "C-", and Maine's Dam Infrastructure scored a "D-".

The current level of funding funding limits the capacity of the Maine Dam Safety Program to inspect dams, identify & mitigate potential risks to public safety. I want to thank multiple stakeholders, including the Maine Dam Safety Program, for their help in shaping LD 1488. We hope that the passage of this bill will enable Maine to evaluate our dam safety efforts and identify areas where additional investment and changes can be made.

This bill is an important first step. We hope this committee will support LD 1488, and we are eager to see how the study work takes shape and what recommendations may surface for future legislation.

I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1488.

Thank you