



May 3, 2021

Testimony of Esther Bizier, P.E., President Elect
Maine Section American Society of Civil Engineers
To the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

In Support of

L.D. 1488 - Resolve, To Study and Recommend Improvements to Maine's Dam Safety

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Esther Bizier. I am the President Elect of the Maine Section, American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and a Senior Engineer with Main-Land Development Consultants, Inc. I am here today to share the Maine Section of ASCE's support for LD 1488. The membership of the Maine Section ASCE is made up of more than 700 civil engineering professionals who live and work in Maine. Founded in 1852, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) represents more than 150,000 civil engineers worldwide and is America's oldest national engineering society.

In December 2020, The Maine Section released the 2020 Report Card for Maine's Infrastructure. The Report grades 16 major infrastructure categories using a simple "A" to "F" format and examines current infrastructure conditions and needs, assigning grades and making recommendations on how to raise them. Through this format, ASCE works to raise awareness for the public on the current state of our infrastructure system, as well as the most pressing infrastructure challenges. It is important to note that with the grading scale the report card is based on, it is not financially feasible for every category to be an "A". ASCE considers infrastructure categories that are in the B range to be "Good and Adequate for now" while an infrastructure category receiving a "C" means it is "mediocre and requires attention".

The quality of our infrastructure is an issue that affects everyone in Maine. Infrastructure is the foundation of our state's economy and daily lives. Our economy, ability to create jobs, personal incomes, and the ability to compete globally as a state are all linked directly to infrastructure. Unfortunately, despite being essential to our lives and economy, we have let our infrastructure languish. Maine's infrastructure is facing mounting needs for age, delayed maintenance, and growing usage.

The 2020 Report Card gave 16 categories of infrastructure an overall grade of a 'C-,' meaning the state's infrastructure is in mediocre condition. The report highlights some positive trends due to increased funding in the past several years, but not enough to make the grade go up since 2016, which was also a 'C-.'

Maine's Dams received a D+ in the 2020 ASCE Maine Infrastructure Report Card, which is slightly better than the national average of a D but is the same grade the Dams category received in the 2008, 2012, and 2016 Maine State Report Cards. There are 1,073 dams in Maine currently



known to the Maine Emergency Management Agency. The true number of dams is unknown as there is no requirement to register a dam in Maine. These dams range from non-engineered 19th-century mill dams to highly engineered hydropower facilities. In Maine, 148 registered dams are classified as significant- and high-hazard dams with the potential to cause significant damage or loss of life if they were to fail. Of these 148 dams, 50% are classified as fair or unsatisfactory condition.

The average Maine dam is 104 years old. Some of these dams may have been constructed prior to the establishment of formal engineering practices and many of Maine's dams are showing signs of deterioration. The current level of funding limits the capacity of the Maine Dam Safety Program to inspect dams, identify and mitigate potential risks to public safety, and administer Maine's dam safety program.

As part of the Report Card, the Maine Section identified five steps as a solution help improve the grades:

1. Know what you have through asset management data;
2. Know what you need to understand risk, enable economic growth, and innovate;
3. Know what it costs and educate the public on the true value of infrastructure;
4. Make the investment;
5. Keep learning and adapting

LD 1488 will be a great first step in the solution to help raise the grade for dams in Maine, which is why it is supported by the Maine Section of ASCE. LD 1488 will enable the department to take a step back and look at our State's dams in a broader sense: to review the laws and rules governing dams, to complete a comprehensive survey of our State's existing dams infrastructure and identify potential federal loan or grant programs for dam owners. Once the study is complete, it will allow the department and policy makers to understand the benefits these dams provide to our state, the risk that unmaintained dams pose to public safety, and the needs of our State's dam infrastructure. This will allow your committee and legislator colleagues, in the future, to propose informed policies based on the study's findings that better prepare Maines dams for the needs of Maines people, environment, and economy.

The future of our state relies on our ability to maintain and improve the condition of our infrastructure. These systems drive economic growth, create jobs, and protect our natural environment. The infrastructure that connects us must be prepared to support all who come to enjoy what Maine has to offer. We work hard to build and maintain our systems for the public's health, safety, and welfare, and we ask that our policymakers review the 2020 Report Card for Maine's Infrastructure when forming infrastructure policy that affects our citizens.

A full copy of the Report Card for Maine's Infrastructure is available at:
<https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/state-item/maine/>

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.