

Testimony of Richard S. Behr on LD 1979 to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

February 28, 2022

Good morning committee members and thank you for the opportunity to express my views in opposition to LD 1979.

My name is Richard S. Behr. I was born and raised in Maine and having spent a great deal of my youth on the banks of a polluted Maine river (Union River in Ellsworth), I recognize how much we have accomplished as well as how much work remains. In 1987, not long after completing a graduate program in Canada, I began a thirty year career as a hydrogeologist for the Department of Environmental Protection. In more recent years, I have operated a guiding business on the Kennebec, Penobscot and Androscoggin Rivers. Through all these years I have remained an advocate for Maine's environment. I am therefore submitting this written testimony in opposition to LD 1979, because its primary aim is to restrict Maine citizens and our Natural Resource Agencies from continuing the work necessary to restore the ecological health of Maine's inland waterways.

During my lifetime I have witnessed tremendous improvements in the water quality of Maine's lakes, ponds, streams and rivers. During the past thirty years, Maine has made significant progress to restore our migratory fishes, yet there is much left to accomplish. For example, while untreated municipal and industrial wastewater is no longer discharged to the Union River, the Union's native migratory fishes remain unable to access suitable habitat due to an impassable dam. Having participated in the efforts to remove the Edwards Dam in Augusta, I have watched the free-flowing section of the Kennebec begin to function once more as a river. My experiences on the Kennebec River, before and after the removal of Edwards, reinforce my opposition to LD 1979. Bear in mind, language in this bill would prohibit restoration projects like the removal of the Edwards dam.

As a registered Maine fishing guide, each year I spend hundreds of hours on the restored section of the Kennebec below Waterville. With the removal of Edwards nearly twenty three years ago, I have witnessed from the guide seat of a drift boat, the resurgence of many of the river's migratory fishes. Throughout the guiding season, my clients get a glimpse of the river's bounty as we observe schools of migrating river herring, spawning sea lampreys, cruising stripers and the Kennebec's iconic sturgeon. Each year, the Kennebec's migratory fish play a vital roll in the ecological vitality of the watershed.

While a marvelous sight to witness, I remind clients that only a small fraction of the river's potential has been realized. To date, Maine's citizens should be proud of this progress, but there is much more work to accomplish. This bill will only serve to prevent the people of Maine

from continuing the on-going efforts to carefully and thoughtfully protect and restore Maine's water and fisheries resources.

I'll close my testimony with one last observation. After all these years, I am not surprised that a special interest group would once more proclaim, Pickerel or Payrolls. It was a false dichotomy then and it remains so today. The success of the Clean Water Act clearly demonstrates we can work to restore the ecological health of Maine's waterways without jeopardizing jobs.

I urge you to oppose LD 1979 so the work to restore Maine's migratory fishes can continue.

Richard S. Behr

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LD 1979

I have attached a pdf with my testimony.