

**Testimony of Ben Lucas, on behalf of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce
IN SUPPORT OF
LD 1979, An Act To Sustain Good-paying Jobs in the Forest Products Industry by Ensuring
Consistency between Comprehensive River Resource Management Plans and State Water Quality
Standards**

February 28, 2022

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Ben Lucas, and I am a resident of Portland. I am here today representing the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, a statewide business organization consisting of a network of more than 5,000 large and small employers across Maine. The Maine State Chamber of Commerce is testifying in support of LD 1979.

We appreciate Sen. Jackson for bringing this legislation forward. The Chamber is supportive for two major reasons: first, this legislation will help protect more than 700 jobs at the Somerset Mill, it will require balanced decisions for regulatory outcomes impacting existing uses on our rivers; and second it also aims to help support our ongoing commitment to fight against the economically and environmentally harmful impacts of climate change by encouraging and protecting existing sources of renewable energy.

We understand the concerns about the fish passage on the Kennebec, but with respect to the Shawmut Dam, any solution must not include removal of the Shawmut Dam. Any outcome that leads to dam removal would endanger businesses along the river that rely on this clean, Maine-made energy source. The Shawmut Dam is critical to the ongoing operations of the mill, and if the water level drops too low, they will be forced to close. This would have a devastating economic effect on the area through massive job loss, tax revenues lost, businesses in the area whose economies rely on the mill's operations in the area will all be gravely harmed. We believe LD 1979 helps to strike the right balance between environmental regulation and economic vitality in this region.

Governor Mills has made climate change a priority of her administration and established the Maine Climate Council which recently released its report, "Maine Won't Wait." As part of this, Governor Mills has set a goal for Maine of reducing our carbon emissions by 45% by 2030 and 80% by 2050. The Maine State Chamber of Commerce supports these reduction goals for our state, which is why protecting existing renewable sources that already exists in Maine is so critical.

Two closing points I would make – the first being LD 1979 will add greater predictability and legislative engagement to the regulatory process that will determine the continued operations of the lower Kennebec dams. The Chamber will always support efforts to give more predictability to Maine businesses as it is critical our businesses have a consistent and streamlined regulatory process. The other being we still support involvement from the regulatory agencies, and we would not want to see that go away, however given the importance of these hydropower assets – and their relevance to the Somerset Mill's continued operation – we believe having both the

legislature and regulatory agencies involved again will create greater clarity for all parties, including Maine businesses.

To conclude, we would encourage the committee to vote, “Ought To Pass” on LD 1979. At a time when electric rates have dramatically increased, we should not be taking any actions that risk potential low cost, Maine-made hydropower. I hope we can all agree that we must do everything we can to protect critical Maine-based jobs. Thank you for allowing me to testify, I’ll be happy to answer any questions and I will be at the work session.

Ben Lucas, Government Relations Specialist, Maine State Chamber of Commerce
Phone: 207-441-9333 | Email: blucas@mainechamber.org