

Testimony in favor of LD 1473

An Act to Protect Certain Unfiltered Drinking Water Sources Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Senate Chair Brenner, House Chair Gramlich and Members of the Joint Standing Committee, my name is Neria Douglass of Auburn.

I'm here today to urge you to pass LD 1473, An Act to Protect Certain Unfiltered Drinking Water Sources. Water sustains life. We need to protect these watersheds. The EPA agrees that water in nine Maine municipalities meets requirements of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, and is pure without high filtration costs. For over 100 years, Lake Auburn has been the drinking water for Lewiston and Auburn, and now part of Poland. Since 1991 it has been annually exempted from filtration.

The bill aims to help maintain these waivers with no negative effect on our goals of creating affordable housing. It is important to our communities. Affordable water rates are part of affordable housing. The cost of filtration will double or triple our water rates: residents, schools, businesses, hospitals, fire protection. That must be true in the other six communities with unfiltered drinking water: Portland, Raymond, Casco, Sebago, Frye Island, Bangor, Damariscotta, Presque Isle, Bar Harbor, and Mount Desert.

We have worked hard to protect Lake Auburn. In 1993, over thirty years ago, the Lake Auburn Water Protection Commission (LAWPC) was created by Auburn and Lewiston. It purchased as much land as it could and acquired conservation easements and life estates in the watershed. Camps were removed and returned to woodland. Two miles of Whitman Spring Road on the lakeshore were closed to motorized vehicles and gated for a nature trail. Boat launches on the western shore were closed. Strict septic system requirements limited development. Citizen education and other measures were taken.

However, the unfiltered drinking water of Lake Auburn is under threat. Warming climate and fewer months of ice cover are threats. Algae blooms have already occurred requiring alum treatment. Large tracts of open land in our watershed have been purchased by developers. Development will add phosphorus and other contaminants. Housing near Lake Auburn will not be affordable. One developer plans to build over 1,000 housing units at market rates in the watershed extremely close to the southern shore. That large area is next to the capped former Auburn Dump containing toxic waste. So far the dump has been undisturbed by human activity, but that will change with nearby buildings. We must take action to protect our drinking water. This bill is part of that effort.

My home is in the watershed and has a well. We have woodland that we might be able to further develop without passage of this bill. We choose to protect our natural resources. We support pure, affordable water. Please help us keep our water rates affordable. Passing this bill will not diminish our goals of creating more affordable housing. In fact, it works to keep living affordable. Water is as important as shelter. I urge you to pass LD 1473.

Please vote OughtTo Pass on LD 1473 "An Act to Protect Certain Unfiltered Drinking Water Sources"
Thank you for your time and service to our communities and to the State of Maine.