



Testimony in SUPPORT of:

LD 2101, An Act to Strengthen Shoreland Zoning Enforcement

Submitted to the State and Local Government

February 6, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Nangle, Chair Stover, and Distinguished Members of the State and Local Government Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of LD 2101. My name is Susan Gallo, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Lakes. Our membership organization includes more than 6,000 supporters and volunteers as well as over 80 Lake Associations. We are dedicated to our mission of promoting, protecting, and enhancing lake water quality and habitat, and of preserving the ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits of Maine's lakes for everyone.

I encourage you to review the over 40 pieces of testimony these folks have submitted online as of this writing.

Our members work hard to protect the quality of Maine's lakes for their many ecological and aesthetic values, including their scenic beauty, the habitat they provide for wildlife, and the opportunities they provide us to rest, relax, and recreate.

While often not the reason driving our members to take action, the economic value of clean, healthy lakes I imagine is of utmost interest to this committee. According to a recent study at the University of Maine:

- Maine's 6,000 lakes and ponds are valued at \$14 BILLION per year in terms of the economic activity they generate.
- Maine's lakes support 52,000 jobs.
- Maine's lakes provide \$105 MILLION in public drinking water value for about half of

our population.

- Maine's lakes host over 5 MILLION visitors per year.
- Good water quality and safety from bacterial contamination are listed as the most important considerations for visitors when choosing a Maine lake to visit.
- **Maine's lakefront homes have a cumulative value of more than \$11.8 BILLION**

Not only are lakefront properties an incredibly important piece of Maine's local economies (sometimes providing over half the property tax revenue for a community), they are the last line of defense protecting lakes from nutrient pollution.

Nutrient pollution, primarily too much phosphorus in lake water, feeds excess algae growth, which in turn creates a "bloom". You might have seen (or smelled) the results of an algae bloom. Stagnant, green water that is not pleasant (or safe) for humans or wildlife.

Our shoreland zoning laws were created to protect the health of our lakes. One of the ways they do that is by ensuring that there is only minimal disturbance to natural vegetation along the shoreline. That natural vegetation ensures that rain is both intercepted and absorbed into the ground and significantly reduces nutrient pollution.

Even though some may complain, the vast majority of landowners comply with our shoreland zoning laws, and the result is that Maine boasts some of the cleanest, healthiest lakes of any state in the nation.

Violating shoreland zoning laws by smoothing large areas to plant lawns along the shore, cutting legacy trees and shrubs that provide shade and erosion benefits, and removing ground cover ensures that more rain, and more nutrient pollution, will flow from a property into the water.

And what happens when a wealthy landowner decides to ignore the laws that apply to everyone else? What happens when fines are inconsequential? And what happens when the lake, a public resource that belongs to all of us, is harmed by egregious violations that put long-term water quality at risk? Economists have documented that property values go down when water quality decreases. Why should other property owners, as well as town budgets, lake users, and wildlife, experience a loss because of outlandish violations of clear, common sense shoreland zoning laws?

LD 2101 gives municipalities and the Land Use Planning Commission the tools they need to more effectively stop egregious shoreland zoning violations and protect our lake water quality and wildlife habitat.

Please vote **OUGHT TO PASS** on this important bill to ensure the future health of both Maine's lakes and the huge economic engine they help power.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.