

April 20, 2021

In favor of L.D. 1497, An Act To Establish the Maine Youth Impact Commission

Good Morning, Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and Honorable members of the joint standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business:

My name is Thea Sweet and I am a 23 year old resident of Hallowell, Maine. I am here to testify in favor of LD 1497. I am a recent graduate from Connecticut College and earned my degree in international relations during the peak of the COVID pandemic. Now, I'm a fellow with Maine Youth Power, which is an inclusive movement of young Mainers working in solidarity for human dignity, equity and a livable future.

I am a co-organizing director of this initiative, working alongside Jane Dawson who is a senior in high-school and has contributed a great deal to this bill throughout the organizing journey. I saw a need to establish a youth impact commission because, currently, there is no permanent part of state government whose sole purpose is dedicated to ensuring that our youth have a prosperous, sustainable and secure future in Maine. Maine is the oldest state in the nation and needs to make a concerted effort to keep young people here, as well as to encourage young people from other states to call Maine home. To have the most impact, I believe that we need a structural and permanent vehicle for young people to be represented in government, where their visions for the future of our state are heard and implemented through policy. The Commission has a dual focus - one is to collect data that can be used to advocate for innovative policies aimed to benefit young people, and the other purpose is to be a resource for departments of state government on how their policies will *impact* young people. We envision that the Commission will consist of 15 members appointed by the Governor, Speaker of the House, and President of the Senate. We are asking for 3 staff people and that it be housed in the Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. I encourage you to look through the powers and duties section of this bill in order to get a comprehensive glimpse of the impact young people could have in state government.

As a young person striving to find opportunity near home, I also truly want to make a difference and see my peers, neighbors and fellow community members thrive. Young people, like all voters, want to believe in government and be civically engaged, but we don't have a focal point. More importantly, the creation of this commission would send a powerful message to young people across our state and nation --- that you want us here.

By creating an agency that gives power to youth voices, it enables us to have input on a wide variety of issues as we chart Maine's future. Whether it be finding good paying job opportunities close to home, finding housing and meeting basic survival needs - young people know our own and our peers' experiences better than anybody else. It is time to listen to our expertise and value

our voices so that we can ensure that Maine is vibrant and thriving for many generations to come.

In closing, I'd like to personally thank all the people who have worked so hard on this legislation and have submitted testimony although they are unable to testify in person. In addition, I have a petition with close to 500 people who have signed supporting this bill.

I hope you will too. Please vote “ought to pass” and create this Youth Impact Commission.

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