



STATE OF MAINE
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF POLICY INNOVATION AND THE FUTURE
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AUGUSTA, MAINE
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**An Act to Establish the Maine Youth Impact Commission LD 1497
Testimony of Ana Hicks
Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future**

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Good Morning, Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, my name is Ana Hicks and I am a Senior Policy Analyst and Children's Cabinet Coordinator in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation the Future. I am here today to testify neither for nor against LD 1497, An Act To Establish the Maine Youth Impact Commission.

In 2019, Governor Mills established the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to address critical, long-term issues facing Maine, by engaging state agencies, stakeholders and the public in the planning and implementation of innovative, data-driven policy solutions. The office's current leadership areas include: climate and energy policy, including the Maine Climate Council; opioid response and prevention; the Governor's Children's Cabinet, which focuses on cross agency collaboration to align and strengthen programs and policies for young children and youth; and economic innovation and workforce development policy. In response to the COVID19 pandemic, the office also provided planning, policy, communications and technology support to the Governor and several state agencies, and managed the Governor's Economic Recovery Committee.

We thank Representative Warren for bringing forward this proposal to engage young people to inform state policy and programming. As the state with the oldest population in the country, we strongly agree that engaging young people is crucial and ensure their voices are heard in policy making. Successful youth engagement can be powerful to support youth development and to ensure that policies and programs are developed and implemented in a way that truly meets the needs of young people. The Children's Cabinet and the Climate Council, which are housed in GOPIF, are committed to engaging youth in policy development and implementation. At the Children's Cabinet we have set a goal of ensuring that all Maine youth enter adulthood healthy and connected to the workforce and/or education. And we are working on a variety of measures across departments to support that goal.

Across state government, agencies are partnering with key stakeholders to develop polices and programming to improve opportunities for young people in our state. For example, Department of Labor is working to establish new Youth Apprenticeship Programs and staff from DECD are leading work groups to implement the recommendations of the 10-year state economic plan which include the Maine Career Exploration program to provide students with exposure to career opportunities, opportunities to explore areas of interest and work-based learning opportunities.

We wanted to share information about current efforts to engage youth to help inform and drive policymaking in our state. While this list is not inclusive of all current youth-adult partnerships in the state or in state government, it does provide a snapshot of efforts underway to ensure that young people are participating in and informing policy decisions.

- **In 2019, Department of Education Commissioner, Pender Makin, established a Student Cabinet to advise and inform programming and policy at DOE.** The Cabinet is made up of approximately 30 students from 4th grade through the first year in college representing every county in the state. The purpose of the Student Cabinet is to provide a forum for Maine students' voices to be heard by Maine DOE which sets policy and provides guidance to administrators, teachers and staff in all School Administrative Units across the state.
- **Several state agencies and the legislature partner with the Cutler Institutes' Youth and Community Engagement (YCE) Team at the University of Southern Maine and Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN) to engage youth in informing policy development and the implementation of new programming and policies.**
 - The Young People's Caucus, which was established through a partnership between Representative Victoria Morales, YCE and MYAN, has focused on bringing together youth with distinct lived experiences and perspectives to the halls of the state house to educate and inform policymakers, both within the legislature and the Mills Administration, and to influence policy decisions made at the state level. In the summer of 2020 the Young People's Caucus engaged youth and educators in ReImagine Education, a collaborative project to address racism in the school system. This past fall, staff participating in the Maine Children's Cabinet met regularly with the Young People's Caucus to discuss issues related to youth engagement, racial equity and paid work experience for youth to inform policy development and implementation. Moving forward the Children's Cabinet and state agency staff hopes to continue to partner with the Young People's Caucus to help guide the implementation of specific strategies.
 - The YCE Team at Cutler Institute also staffs the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT), a group of Maine youth in foster care who provide leadership and representation for youth who come in contact with the child welfare system. YLAT members have established a strong partnership with the adults who work within the child welfare system, including staff at DHHS and community partners, in order to work together to improve outcomes for youth in foster care.
 - Maine Youth Action Network supports a Statewide Youth Policy Board and is piloting Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) programs—a model where young people research deeply into issues they care about, identify possible solutions and present their findings to lawmakers, school boards and other decision-making adults. MYAN is currently partnering with the Centers for Disease Control to train and support high school students to develop and advocate for restorative models in schools. In school

communities, restorative models are being used to create supportive environments for all students and effective and appropriate responses to harmful behavior.

- **Youth are represented on the Maine Climate Council and are represented on every one of the Council's working groups and subcommittee's, including the newly created "Equity Subcommittee"**. The Maine Climate Council is committed to involving youth voice in its work and also establishing programming to provide opportunities for young people to gain the necessary skills and training to develop a strong clean energy workforce in our state. We are hopeful for the passage of a resolve to study the establishment of a Maine Climate Corps, one of the recommendations of the Maine Climate Action Plan. A Maine Climate Corps will match Maine's young talent pool with a broad range of career development opportunities, all while helping to meet state and local workforce needs for tackling climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some background on current efforts to engage youth in policymaking and to improve opportunities for young people in Maine.

I'm happy to answer any questions.