

Grace Nichols  
Portland, ME  
LD 928

Your Honorable State Representatives,

I ask you to codify into law the following language: "Article 1, Section 25. Environmental rights. The people of the State have the right to a clean and healthy environment and to the preservation of the natural, cultural and healthful qualities of the environment. The State may not infringe upon these rights. The State shall conserve, protect and maintain the State's natural resources, including, but not limited to, its air, water, land and ecosystems for the benefit of all the people, including generations yet to come."

This is a no brainer. This is what Maine says it stands for. And Maine has done very well by our environment. We have some of the best air in the country. We do not struggle with fossil fuel extraction interests here. But we do have challenges, as there are in every state of the union, in balancing the desires of industry with the rights of the people and other organisms who call Maine home.

My former home of New York State passed this amendment to our Constitution. There, we have endless environmental justice struggles and a need to assert the right of every person to clean air, water and a healthy environment. New York is often targeted as a place we should frack (we defeated that) or a place we should burn garbage for energy (we keep defeating that one, though it's not a complete victory.) We know that putting that expectation into law is a strong first step to making our duty towards all our citizens a reality. There too, we have struggled with PFAS. In Cohoes, north of Albany, a company named Norlite incinerated it (in the form of firefighting foam) and then the ash from that process fell on the public housing development next door. For a very long time. Yes, we need the amendment.

But here in Maine, too, we have challenges with some entities convincing our state that it was safe to put sewage sludge on our fields as fertilizer. Now we have PFAS on people's farms and possibly in the food. There are always environmental challenges -- and an amendment to our State Constitution makes it perfectly clear where we stand.

As these amendments are proposed in state after state, it would be so lovely if Maine were in the first five states to adopt one. *Dirigo*. We are leaders!

Let's act like leaders and stand with Pennsylvania, Montana and New York in saying that our deepest unity is based on our love for our land and our waters, and we will never betray them.