

Philomena Ostapchuk
MUUSAN, Newcastle
LD 993

My apology, I had inadvertently included Representative O'Neil on my original submission. Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Philomena Ostapchuk and I am a resident of Newcastle, Maine. I am pleased to be here to testify in support of LD 993, I am here on behalf of MUUSAN, the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network. MUUSAN is a statewide organization that includes members from 26 congregations found throughout the state, as far south as Sanford, to Houlton and Caribou in the north, and other towns like Norway, Pittsfield, Ellsworth, Dexter, Waterville, Castine, and Brunswick, in the major cities Portland, Bangor, Augusta, and other towns. Unitarian Universalists are guided by a set of principles including the principle centered on respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. And it is this principle that brings me here today.

In addition, I also wear the important hat as a grandmother of two grandchildren growing up here in Maine. I have an abiding need to do my part to encourage our Maine government, of which we are all a part, to do its best to ensure a healthy future for my grandchildren and other children. Toward that end, I have been learning about the role of the forests here in Maine, from their important economic value to the significant roles forests play in the sequestration of carbon, as well as sustaining biodiversity within forest habitats, and our own impact on the health of forests. We know that the directions we take in the next decades with regard to global warming will have a huge impact on the quality of life for our future generations like my grandchildren. Therefore, I think bringing together stakeholders in the forest is essential for sharing information and offering advise.

We need to be good stewards of our forests, and what better way than to set up a clearly defined advisory group. The appointed members would be representing the many aspects of forestry - from economic interest groups, to environmental and ecological interests, state agency representation and recreational groups. The role of this group would be advisory and allow for open conversations of how best we can meet all of our needs with regard to sustaining healthy forests and the diversity of the inhabitants of the forests. As a citizen of Maine, I or any other citizen, would be able to clearly see who specifically is in the advisory group to be able to send my comments, direct my questions and have access to their reports. I urge your committee to support this bill. The forests of Maine are our treasure. Thank you for your attention.