

Dear Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

I am submitting testimony today as a lifelong Mainer, a mother, and an educator. I do not speak on behalf of the University of Maine system, but I do draw insights from my decades of teaching in the area of social justice and social change.

A majority of people, in Maine and across the country, are fearful about the future¹. We know we face unprecedented problems *and* we do not believe we can or will work together to forge solutions that include all of us. Instead, we imagine scenarios where a small number hoard resources and leave everyone else to do the hardest work with little chance of thriving. Stories of our incapacity or unwillingness to cooperate have taken root more than the stories of remarkable collective action for justice and change. We have a chance to change the narrative, and the reality for many, with the passage of the Pine Tree Amendment.

My students sometimes express a sense of nihilism – even trying to make a change for the better seems pointless given the levels of corruption they perceive in business, Government, and throughout our communities. Others advocate for individual action, but grow angry when they compare the yield of their work to give up “fast fashion” and single use plastic in comparison to the carbon released by private jets leaving the Super Bowl. Many advocate not giving up – they acknowledge that the work is hard and the odds may be low, but they see the value of *trying*. These students show up to groups like Maine Youth for Climate Justice and generate new ideas, like the Pine Tree Amendment.

I am in this camp – increasingly fearful as I track the ecological changes in my favorite places, but not ready to throw in the towel on a liveable future for all of us. I believe most in Maine are right there with me - we are not quitters. I am submitting testimony today as a parent and educator, concerned about the well being of today’s young people and committed to partnering with them as we forge ahead into uncertain climate conditions. It would be so much if our elected leaders make a similar commitment – we will not simply pass our problems onto them by delaying action.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2021/11/mental-health-effects-climate-change>

A 2021 study² quantified the emotional burden that youth are carrying, as they live with the consequences of climate catastrophes that infringe on their current and future security,

“[Respondents](#) across all countries were worried about climate change (59% were very or extremely worried and 84% were at least moderately worried). More than 50% reported each of the following emotions: sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty. More than 45% of respondents said their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily life and functioning, and many reported a high number of negative thoughts about climate change (eg, 75% said that they think the future is frightening and 83% said that they think people have failed to take care of the planet).“

58% of [American](#) youth said they feel anxious, 54% afraid, and 46% reported feeling helpless about their futures. Only 24% of respondents from the United States, and only 30% of young people world wide, feel optimistic about the future. These statistics challenge our narrative that “the kids will save us” or that “the kids are alright.” They challenge our national story of faith in “a better future”.

[Maine’s](#) own data on adolescent well-being shows an even more disturbing trend. According to the 2021 [Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey](#)³, 49% of high school students and 45 % of middle school students believe they **do not matter** in the communities where they live. Less than half of high school students experience support from adults who are not their parents. Again, we have a chance to step up, to be the adults students look toward for support. The [IPCC report](#)⁴ released on March 20th 2023 amplifies all of these anxieties. Young people are not wrong to worry that adults in power will make short term decisions that fail to take their needs into account. Let’s show them another way!

The passage of the Pine Tree Amendment is not a promise that our climate emergency will be solved, or that we will necessarily find solutions everyone agrees with. Instead,

² Hickman, C. et al Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey

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https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2021_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2021_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>

it's a communication to our Government that we expect good-faith effort to create policy that prioritizes our collective survival – clean air, water and soil - and that we will not make decisions or allocate resources that presumes there is a clean-up-crew coming in the shape of our kids, grandkids and great-grandkids. It is a communication to our kids that we are listening, that we will not abandon them for our short-term gain, that we are not leaving anyone behind as we navigate the uncertainties ahead.

Your vote for the Pine Tree Amendment will send it out to ratification, engaging Mainers in a very necessary conversation about the future we wish to create with each other. Help move us beyond fear and cynicism and toward enacting our genuine commitment to a liveable future for all of us.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Simmons, PhD
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