

March 22, 2023

To: Senator Stacy Brenner, Representative Lori Gramlich, and Honorable members of the committee

From: Roberta Hill

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 928, a Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources;

My name is Roberta Hill. I live in Buckfield and I am an ecological systems scientist and educator, organic grower, mother and grandmother. I am testifying as a private citizen today in favor of LD 928.

I have been working in environmental protection in Maine for the past 30 years; primarily my focus has been on Maine lakes. Over that time, I have worked with literally thousands of people who are passionate about the environment--long time Maine residents, summer residents, all thoroughly committed to the stewardship of their lakes, and volunteering countless hours to *preserve* what they love for future generations, bringing their time and energy and skills to an ongoing effort that ultimately benefits every Mainer and everyone who loves Maine. But the fact is that all of this incredibly dedicated and important work will largely come to naught if we do not address the climate emergency that is bearing down upon us, that is already here warming the gulf of Maine faster than nearly any marine system on the planet, sending new invasive species northward to Maine in an endless march, changing our seasons, greening our lakes with toxic algae, and disrupting all of the natural cycles that have for thousands of years, made Maine the very place it is.

Scientists here in Maine and across the globe have told us in no uncertain terms that when it comes to the greenhouse gas emissions, we have less than one decade to make a complete about face. Slowing is down is a start but it is *not* enough. Just as if we were driving along a road and suddenly see that the bridge before us has just collapsed; slowing down is not sufficient; we need to hit the brakes and stop going in that direction and then find a new way to get to where we want to go.

Our current environmental laws are not sufficient to address the urgency of the reality we now face. These laws for the most part, however well-meaning, were not--even from the start--intended to stop pollution, they were intended to regulate it, to slow it down, make it tolerable, at least for the most privileged among us. And laws that were so promising when first enacted--the

Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Endangered Species Act--have all been eroded since, primarily because powerful interests, the large powerful often multi-national companies, those that do the extraction, that do the processing, that market and deliver the products, that create the waste and emit of pollution, have steadily managed to gain political power and then with that power, to bend the laws in their favor. The more power these interests have gained, the more bending they have been capable of doing. And in the process both our environmental laws and the democratic institutions that helped to first enact them, have become weakened, at a time when we urgently need them the most.

The Pine Tree Amendment has the ability to help us find our new way, to get us going in our new direction. If it is radical, it is only so in the sense that it is putting forth a common sense proposal in a world that seems much of the time to have simply lost its common sense. Yes, of course people now and in the future should have a right to clean air, clean water and a healthy environment. If we cannot promise these basic necessities for life through the institutions through which we seek to govern ourselves, what is the purpose of these institutions?

In the process of helping us to find our new direction environmentally, moving us away from dirty energy and toward the green jobs of our future, the Pine Tree Amendment, by giving the people of Maine a fighting chance to help protect their neighborhoods, their communities, their children's' health, their cultural heritage, their very way of life, it will also be providing us with new tools with which we can begin use to begin to restore the vibrancy and integrity of our democratic institutions.

And let us remember, passage of LD 928 will not grant us any of these things I have just mentioned; it will simply grant us, the people of Maine, the right to decide for *ourselves* if we really do wish to take on the hard work of changing our direction or not. I, for one, trust the people of Maine to make this critically important decision. And I hope you all do too.

I thank you for your service to Maine, and I urge you to support this bill of great historic importance.

Roberta Hill
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