



## **Testimony in Support of LD 1621, An Act Regarding Environmental Justice**

**To the Joint Standing Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources  
by Josh Caldwell, Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator**

**April 24, 2023**

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, honorable members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Josh Caldwell, and I am the Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM has been working for more than 60 years to protect, restore, and conserve Maine’s environment. I’m here today on behalf of our 25,000 members and supporters to testify in strong support of LD 1621, An Act Regarding Environmental Justice.

Historically marginalized and underserved communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change and environmental degradation.<sup>1</sup> In order to effectively respond to these inequitable effects, it is paramount that our state agencies provide due consideration to environmental justice populations and frontline communities in decision making. Further, it is essential that definitions delineating “environmental justice,” “frontline communities,” and related terminology are legally established in order to ensure statewide accountability to those shared definitions. Right now, state agencies do not have the tools to appropriately assess environmental justice in their decision making, and LD 1621 would help to fix that.

The Maine Climate Council’s Equity Subcommittee has provided recommendations that call for meaningful community engagement and equitable implementation of the strategies contained within Maine’s Climate Action Plan.<sup>2</sup> Without formal guidance for state agencies, these recommendations are not enforceable. Adopting environmental justice definitions and practices that adequately reflect Maine’s demographics and socio-cultural characteristics will enable pursuit of our environmental and climate goals in an equitable manner with engagement from the communities that are most impacted.

LD 2018, passed last year, established the definitions for “environmental justice,” “frontline communities,” “fair treatment,” and “meaningful engagement” following several community-engaged listening sessions facilitated by the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. However, those definitions were stripped from the bill during the appropriations process.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-report-shows-disproportionate-impacts-climate-change-socially-vulnerable>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/future/initiatives/climate/climate-council/equity-subcommittee>

LD 1621 would ensure that these same definitions become codified into law so that our state agencies can act upon them.

LD 1621 would provide needed protections for Maine's marginalized and underserved communities as we move forward on our climate response. Maine is already a national leader when it comes to implementing climate solutions, and it is past time that we solidify our commitment to environmental justice while engaging the communities that are currently facing the brunt of climate change and associated environmental degradation.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on this important legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.