

Date: April 25, 2023

To: Transportation Committee

From: Cole Cochran, Maine Youth Action

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1559, An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding.



Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and the honorable members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Cole Cochran, I am a senior at Thornton Academy in Saco, and I am here representing Maine Youth Action, a statewide youth advocacy group that represents hundreds of young Mainers across the state from varying backgrounds. I am here to testify in support of LD 1559, An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding.

Before I delve into why LD 1559 is monumental for the future of our state, there is a harsh reality for young Mainers regarding transportation access, which needs to be noted. Nearly all communities in our state have a crippling dependence on cars. There are no adequate public transit options, our communities have become unwalkable, and alternative transportation such as biking is unsafe on most streets. This has created major barriers to transportation for our youth. For those younger than 16, they have limited mobility, relying mostly on parents and others to drive them to where they need to be, and that can be a huge ask. Some parents work long hours and it is impractical to balance their kids' schedules with theirs. On a more personal note, I grew up in a family of 7 and understand that struggle. My dad works very long hours, so it was my mom that would have to balance her work schedule with the schedules of 5 children. When I was actually talking to her this morning about LD 1559, she said that it would have been extremely helpful to have adequate public transit, especially when my sisters started working their summer jobs. Now, for young adults in their 20s, these barriers to transportation have deeper effects. With no feasible alternative to cars, young adults are heavily restricted in seeking better job

opportunities, higher education, basic amenities and so on. Furthermore, if young adults were able to secure a car, it becomes an incredibly high cost burden. In fact, according to AAA, the cost of owning a car is [on average \\$894 monthly](#). This means that if one worked at the state's minimum wage for 40 hours/week, 52 weeks/year, transportation costs would account for 37% of income.

Besides the major transportation barriers, the youth are also being threatened by the climate crisis. As you all are aware of, effects from climate change are fueled by greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, in Maine, [54% of GHG emissions](#) come from the transportation sector, which is driven by our dependence on gas powered vehicles. In fact, [78% of Mainers commute to work alone](#), which is the highest emitting mode of transportation. We need to have transformative solutions to reducing our transportation emissions, and they can not be solely solved by the electrification of vehicles.

This is what makes LD 1559 really important for the youth of our state. It significantly expands investment in public transit, not just in urban areas like Greater Portland or Biddeford/Saco, but also in rural regions as well. This bill would expand coverage, increase frequency, among other much needed improvements to make it a reliable option. It also provides critical assistance for transit planning in communities, as well as a robust Public Transit Advisory Council that truly represents stakeholders. The initiatives in LD 1559 are critical for youth to have access to job opportunities, higher education, and overall mobility. It also will be an effective measure to reduce our emissions, which is one of the responsibilities for this committee and the legislature. One last thing I would like to note: this investment is made for our future. It will impact my generation when we are adults, have jobs, have families and so on. Therefore, when you consider your position on LD 1559, please take into account that it is your responsibility to determine the outcome of my generation's future. As such, I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1559. I thank you for your time and service.