

Date: January 30, 2024

To: Taxation Committee

From: Cole Cochrane, Maine Youth Action

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 499, An Act to Create a Commuter Benefit



Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry and the esteemed members of the Taxation Committee: My name is Cole Cochrane, I am the Policy Director at Maine Youth Action which is a state youth-led advocacy group that represents hundreds of young Mainers from various backgrounds. I am here today to testify in support of LD 499, which would create a commuter benefit.

Maine Youth Action, in consultation with young folks from multiple regions across the state, has deemed clean public transportation a priority for our generation. There are several issues that public transportation addresses which makes it a pressing priority. First, our transportation sector accounts for 49% of greenhouse gas emissions, the largest emissions sector in Maine.¹ It is also no coincidence that, according to the Maine Department of Transportation, 78% of commuters use single occupancy vehicles, the highest emitting mode of transportation.² Secondly, our car dependency comes at great cost to consumers, especially for younger Mainers- the cost to own and operate a new car has reached an all time high of \$12,182 annually.³ These issues are detrimental to our younger generations and they have a common, underlying theme- they damage the prospects of our future. Whether it may be fueling the climate crisis, or the closing accessibility of better job or educational opportunities, it spells out disaster. As such, it is imperative to bolster our public transportation system in order to provide a cleaner, more affordable mode of transportation to all Mainers.

Of course, there are operational and capital improvements to our system to make it more accessible, which ought to be the responsibility of MaineDOT and the Transportation Committee. However, this committee has legislation before them to make public transit a

¹ https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/inline-files/9th_GHG_Report_FINAL%20%282%29.pdf

² <https://www.bts.dot.gov/sites/bts.dot.gov/files/states2020/Maine.pdf>

³ <https://newsroom.aaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/YDC-Fact-Sheet-FINAL-8.30.23-1.pdf>

sensible option for many workers who already have access. By providing pre-tax commuter benefits, public transit will be extremely affordable, thereby incentivizing workers to convert to transit. This means reducing emissions, as well as providing affordable transportation to young people like myself in order to access necessary job and educational opportunities.

Overall, I urge the committee to vote “ought to pass” on LD 499 given the reasons I stated above.