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Good Afternoon Representatives,

My name is Brianna Carlson, I am a resident of Caribou Maine. I am a turtle biologist, with a Bachelor's of Science in Biology Masters of Science in Marine Biology from The College of Charleston. In one of my first professional jobs, I conducted a reptile survey of the Padre Island National Seashore in Texas. I will never forget one of my coworkers confronting me as I held a beautiful hognose snake I'd caught, pulling out his knife and saying "when you're done, can we make it a good snake?" Indicating of course that the only good snake is a dead snake. Suffice it to say, not everyone is enamored with reptiles.

Fast forward a few years and I had become an adjunct Instructor of Biology at Texas Southmost College. The great challenge of any instructor is to teach. But since I was tasked with teaching non-science majors, my challenge was to teach people to care about what I was teaching. I met this challenge by giving my students many projects to choose from to interact with the subject material on a personal level. Students left my class saying they were proud of what they had learned, including some of my education majors, who left feeling they knew better now how to teach. What you are being asked to consider today, creating a State Reptile, will give Mainers an opportunity to interact with the Wood Turtle in a new way. This vulnerable species, designated a species of special concern, is not an easy one to find. For five years I have been looking each summer on hikes and walks, and I finally saw one when it was brought to the Nylander Museum in Caribou as part of an Interpretive Program presented by the Chewonki Foundation this fall. Naming this elusive turtle, who resides throughout our state, the Maine State Reptile will give students of our state and others a new way to interact with this animal, and new cause to learn about them. Teachers, 4H and scout groups will teach young Mainers about this newly designated animal. It may be the first time many Mainers learn about the Wood Turtle, including discussions of ways to help protect the animal from vehicles and the pet trade industry.

Ultimately, the benefits of naming the Wood Turtle as the State Reptile are best summarized by renowned oceanographer and educator Jacques Cousteau "We only protect what we love, we only love what we understand, and we only understand what we are taught." I ask you today to provide this designation of State Reptile to the Wood Turtle of Maine.