

Date: March 16, 2023

To: Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry Committee

From: Cole Cochrane, Maine Youth Action

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 993, An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input
Regarding Forest Policy in Maine



Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and the honorable members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is Cole Cochrane, I am from 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 993, An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine.

I have lived in Saco my entire life. Throughout my childhood, I always loved exploring through the forests in my backyard, climbing mountains with my family and kayaking Maine's rocky coasts, which I highly recommend visiting Wolfe's Neck if you haven't gotten the chance. Whilst being around Maine's pristine environment, my mother always told me that the forests we explore, the waters we kayak, and the mountains we climb are all ours to take care of. Words never rang truer than what she said, and seeing this room today, I can say confidently that those words are reaffirmed. I believe strongly that we must be stewards of our environment and it is therefore imperative that we take measures to strengthen our role in protecting our forests. This is why I see LD 993 as a critical piece of legislation, especially during these times. We are facing an existential crisis from climate change, and it has significant impacts on all sectors of our life; in this case, the integrity of our forests. Its biodiversity has diminished greatly with the situation expected to worsen as climate change effects compound. In fact, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the 442 plants and animals in Maine are going to experience a 66% population decline by 2100, with another $\frac{1}{3}$ vulnerable (NRCM). Furthermore, the current state of our forests impairs our response to the climate crisis. Although our forests sequester 60% of our annual carbon emissions, it lags behind per acre in comparison to our New England counterparts (Maine Monitor). Carbon sequestration is a foundation of climate action, and we are shamefully underutilizing our forests in light of this. I

mention these facts not because I am some sort of expert in forest management; rather, it serves as a reminder that we have critical problems facing our forest presently, and it will be my generation that will take on this burden. We may ignore these problems now, but they will still be here in the future, and instead with more impact and damage than there needs to be. You are the decision makers, the ones that need to make the right decision for my generation. The creation of a Forest Advisory Board allows us all to be at the table and to discuss the much needed solutions from a diverse perspective, which will mitigate the damages caused thus far and empower our response to climate change.

So speaking as a youth advocate that will deal with the future impacts from decisions made today, and speaking as a Mainer who cherishes the integrity of our environment, I encourage the committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 993. I thank you for your time and your service.