

**Environmental  
Priorities  
Coalition**

Testimony of the Environmental Priorities Coalition

In support of LD 928

*“RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of  
Maine to Establish a Right to a Clean and Healthy Environment”*

Before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee

March 22, 2023

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Beth Ahearn and I offer testimony on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC). The EPC is a partnership of thirty-seven conservation, environmental, and public health organizations who unify around a common agenda every year. The EPC represents over 120,000 members in Maine who want to protect the good health, good jobs, and quality of life that depend upon a healthy environment. LD 928, RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish a Right to a Clean and Healthy Environment” is one of the priority bills for our coalition this year. Thank you to Rep. O’Neil for sponsoring this priority legislation.

Why is such a Constitutional Amendment necessary? Maine people, our livelihoods, and outdoors culture require a healthy environment to thrive. Maine’s identity and economy are based on its natural assets. Our heritage industries and the workers who power them; farmers, fishermen, and foresters, as well as our tourism businesses, depend on a healthy environment to prosper. Clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and a healthy environment for work and recreation contribute to the health and general well-being of all people in Maine.

Currently, there is no foundational principle to guide state policymakers at every level of government in their deliberations to protect the basic essentials for life; clean air, clean water, and healthy ecosystems, for today and future generations.

We must prioritize lasting environmental protections and ongoing climate action. Maine's natural resources; our forests, minerals, aquifers and marine waters are prime targets for out-of-state extractive and commercial-sized industries and must be managed, preserved and protected for all people in Maine, including future generations. Maine people entrust the stewardship of these natural resources to policymakers at every level of government, yet our environmental laws and regulations can be weakened or overturned as administrations and legislatures change. The discovery of toxics like PFAS seeping through our farmlands and waters shows the vulnerability of our environment, the need to uphold its integrity, and the gaps in our current legal protections.

Constitutionally protected environmental rights provide the strongest foundation on which to build a resilient and sustainable Maine for today and the future. Like other provisions in Maine's Declaration of Rights that protect the inalienable rights of all people in our state: freedom of speech; the right to grow, raise, produce, and consume food of your choice; the right to keep and bear arms.

The Pine Tree Amendment (PTA) would require the government at all levels to protect rights to a clean and healthy environment. The PTA would provide guidance to lawmakers and state agencies and ensure that our laws and regulations are interpreted, applied, and enforced in service to that constitutional obligation, assuring government accountability. The PTA would enshrine environmental justice in Maine's Constitution, demonstrating the State's permanent commitment to equity and providing legal standing to those who believe their environmental rights have been violated.

We urge you to vote unanimously "Ought to Pass" on LD 928 in order to protect current and future generations from environmental harm.