

March 22, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

From: Audrey Hufnagel

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 928, a Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and Honorable members of the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Audrey Hufnagel. I am from Damariscotta and I am a junior in high school at Lincoln Academy. I am writing to urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 928.

I have been advocating for the Pine Tree Amendment since last session and one of the things I love about this bill is the way it brings people together. I have seen firsthand the extensive grassroots network of supporters of the movement: farmers and fishermen, democrats and republicans, businesses and young people. I have seen the energy around the Pine Tree Amendment from people in my school and community and people around the state.

I think that part of the reason for this energy and broad support is that the Pine Tree Amendment unites people around the idea of protecting the outdoor places that make our state so beautiful and unique. We all have connections to places that we love and want to protect. For me, it is the Damariscotta River, the beautiful estuary I have grown up alongside. When I was younger, I explored the shores of the river, collecting mud and shells. Now, I like to go on runs along the river or kayak with my friends in the summer. Last summer, I worked doing research on shellfish populations in the estuary. The Damariscotta River is a unique, beautiful and fragile environment. LD 928 will protect it so others can enjoy it as I have.

Not only do we need a clean, healthy environment to enjoy, we also need it to live and thrive. The Pine Tree Amendment would include the right to clean air, clean water and a healthy environment in the Constitution as fundamental rights. It sets a standard that guides government decision making around environmental issues and provides a backstop to prevent protections from being rolled back.

Furthermore, the Pine Tree Amendment secures these rights for all people. All people, regardless of income, race, ethnicity or any other identity, deserve to have clean air to breathe, clean water to drink and a healthy environment. The Pine Tree Amendment is not just about protecting the environment, it is about securing environmental justice.

Finally, the Pine Tree Amendment secures these rights for future generations. As a young person in the state of Maine, I want to see these beautiful places I love protected for generations to be able to enjoy. I want a future where there is still clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. In order to ensure this, these rights must be protected now. This bill is about our future and I urge you to act now and vote “ought to pass” on LD 928.