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Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

RE: LD 1621 - An Act Regarding Environmental Justice

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity testify in support of LD 1621 - An Act Regarding Environmental Justice.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

TNC is especially grateful for the leadership and partnership from Speaker Talbot Ross on this bill. Our organization and the Conservation Law Foundation approached the Speaker and her team in December of last year to discuss how we could take tangible steps forward on environmental justice in Maine. We are deeply honored to be able to work alongside her to advance this important legislation and are eager to continue this work well beyond this session. Additionally, we are grateful to the many sponsors of this bill, including many members of this committee.

Our organization has come to understand that centering equity in our work is critical to achieving TNC's vision of a world where "the diversity of life thrives". Conservation does not happen in a vacuum. The work of conserving natural places inevitably intersects with and affects human communities in ways that create both benefits and burdens. As conservationists and as people, it is our responsibility to understand the full range of these impacts—especially the burdens they impose on communities that have historically experienced oppression and marginalization, and still do today.

LD 1621 has three critical components. It adds definitions for key terms including "environmental justice", "frontline communities" and criteria to define "meaningful

involvement". The bill then requires a more affirmative and proactive approach, requiring the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to actively seek out and facilitate the involvement of communities that may be potentially affected by a decision. Finally, it provides much needed financial capacity to the Department to carry out the provisions of this bill.

TNC unequivocally supports this bill, and we see it as a great step towards more future action on environmental justice in Maine. We are committed to pursuing additional efforts in future legislative session that include measures to ensure the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, addressing cumulative impacts to environmental justice populations, and exploring how Maine agencies might develop specific community engagement plans in all decision making.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of LD 1621. I am happy to answer questions now or in the future.