



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Environment & Natural Resources

From: Ania Wright, Legislative & Political Specialist, Sierra Club Maine

Date: April 24, 2023

Re: **Testimony in Support of LD 1621: *An Act Regarding Environmental Justice***

Dear Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and esteemed members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

I am submitting the following testimony on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nationwide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. We urge the Committee to vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1621; *An Act Regarding Environmental Justice*.

When it comes to the climate crisis and environmental hazards, those who are most vulnerable in our society are often hit first and worst by effects. Whether it be those living in substandard and unweatherized housing unable to keep up with increased energy costs, or Passamaquoddy tribal citizens in Sipayik still struggling to access clean water, unless we are considering environmental justice impacts in decision making, Maine communities risk being left behind.

Ensuring environmental justice is a vital component of addressing the climate crisis, and offers the opportunity to work towards solving multiple intersectional crises that face our communities. Using residents of substandard and unweatherized housing as an example, implementing weatherization initiatives will lead not only to more energy efficient homes that are more environmentally friendly, but will also lessen energy costs and energy burden. This will lead to the additional benefit of more money in residents' pockets, creating a chain reaction of more financial stability for residents and subsequently more money being spent in Maine.

As currently written, L.D. 1621 replicates the DEP portions of L.D. 2018 which was passed last session and subsequently taken off the books on the appropriations table. Sierra Club supports L.D. 1621 as a first step towards environmental protection for and meaningful participation of environmental justice (EJ) communities in Maine. However, we encourage the committee to consider strengthening the bill by including the following:

- Add a requirement that the DEP invest at least 40% of grants, clean-up funds, and technical assistance to environmental justice communities and disadvantaged populations, in line with the White House Justice 40 initiative¹, which has the "goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution." The White House released

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>



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additional commitments to environmental justice last week, including a scorecard that could help DEP in this effort²;

- Add definitions for 'environmental benefits,' 'environmental burdens,' 'environmental justice principles,'³ and 'environmental justice communities'⁴ to ensure accountability and develop criteria to assist in decision making;
- Establish an Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) of well-informed experts and representatives of EJ communities to provide recommendations to DEP in developing rules and community engagement plans; and
- Add requirements for community engagement, including developing an environmental justice community engagement plan that will describe how it will engage EJ populations as it undertakes decision making, takes into consideration recommendations of the EJAC, and describes how the department will provide meaningful involvement in the decision making process.

In order to ensure we are identifying opportunities to address joint-crises and that we are not leaving the most vulnerable Mainers behind in decision making, we urge the committee to vote 'ought to pass' on L.D. 1621, and consider including additional requirements to strengthen the bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ania Wright
Legislative and Political Specialist
Sierra Club Maine

²<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/04/21/fact-sheet-president-biden-signs-executive-order-to-revitalize-our-nations-commitment-to-environmental-justice-for-all/>

³ Suggested definitions can be found in the proposed amendment submitted by the Conservation Law Foundation.

⁴ An environmental justice community definition should be created in collaboration with the Environmental Justice Advisory Council.