



# Environmental Priorities Coalition

Testimony of Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition  
in support of  
**“An Act Regarding Environmental Justice”**  
Before the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
April 24, 2023

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

My name is Beth Aheam 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. We wholeheartedly support LD 1621, which advances those goals by defining, prioritizing, and supporting meaningful community engagement, equitable decision-making, and just environmental policies.

In Maine and across the world, climate change and environmental concerns pose the greatest threats to communities that are already marginalized, overburdened, or underserved. For example, people who live in substandard housing, who are experiencing homelessness, or who lack access to reliable transportation are more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather caused by climate change. Because climate change and environmental hazards are inextricably linked to equity, solutions must be, too.

Over several years, entities including the Maine Climate Council and its Equity Subcommittee, the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, and the prior Legislature – as well as many, many Maine people and organizations – have acknowledged the urgency of equitably

addressing the climate crisis. Just last year, environmental justice legislation<sup>1</sup> was enacted into law, with the full support of this committee and of the Department of Environmental Protection before being removed from the books during the appropriations process. Hence, Maine still lacks a legal framework to ensure that environmental policies are developed, implemented, and enforced in close partnership with the communities impacted "first and worst" by environmental and climate threats.

This is unacceptable.

Maine needs processes and definitions to consider environmental justice and to ensure the thoughtful distribution of benefits and mitigation of burdens as we implement the strategies of *Maine Won't Wait*, the State's four-year plan for climate action. Current structures and actions are insufficient and cannot be improved without adequate staffing and leadership.

Many EPC member organizations will weigh in with specific suggestions for definitions, processes, and timelines to strengthen and implement *An Act Regarding Environmental Justice*. As you evaluate and refine these details, the entire Coalition urges your full-throated support of LD 1621, which must include an adequate fiscal note.

Meaningful community engagement requires a meaningful investment in environmental justice leadership. Maine must settle for nothing less.

Thank you.

Beth Ahearn  
Director of Government Affairs  
Maine Conservation Voters

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<sup>1</sup> 130th Legislature, LD 2018: An Act To Implement Recommendations Regarding the Incorporation of Equity Considerations in Regulatory Decision Making