

Date May 9, 2023

To Transportation Committee

From. Cole Cochrane, Maine Youth Action

Re Testimony in Support of LD 408, An Act to Establish a “No Fare for Cleaner Air” Law in Maine



Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and the honorable members of the Transportation Committee My name is Cole Cochrane, I am a senior at Thornton Academy in Saco, and I am the Policy Director at Maine Youth Action, which is a statewide youth advocacy group that represents hundreds of young Mainers on critical issues facing us Maine Youth Action is testifying in support of LD 408, An Act to Establish a “No Fare for Cleaner Air” Law in Maine

I have expressed these sentiments in this committee before, but I would like to reiterate them in my testimony The youth of our state face numerous challenges given our current transportation system First and foremost, my generation will be facing the brunt of the climate crisis We will have to deal with a dire reality that includes environmental degradation, significantly reduced quality of life, and a tumultuous economic outlook As you all are probably aware of, the climate crisis is fueled by our greenhouse gas emissions, and in Maine, 54% of emissions come from the transportation sector (1) This is heavily driven by our dependence on cars and promotion of car centric infrastructure, which has resulted in 78% of Mainers commuting to work in a car alone (2), the highest emitting mode of transportation. However, the challenges we face are not simply from the effects of climate change Our current dependence on cars inhibits transportation access, which prevents young Mainers from accessing better job opportunities, higher education and overall mobility Furthermore, if my generation actually does have access to a car, the costs associated with car ownership are significant In fact, according to AAA, the average costs tend to be \$894 monthly (3) If one was to work at the state’s minimum wage for 40 hours/week for 52 weeks/year, this means that over 37% of one’s income is going towards transportation To put that in perspective, experts widely define affordable transportation as 20% of one’s income (4)

It's clear that this is not the case for roughly 79,000 Mainers, who work between minimum wage and \$14.99 hourly (5)

Overall, these challenges are significant for my generation and require action from the legislature. Policy making of today will impact the reality of tomorrow. Therefore, LD 408 works towards addressing these challenges. By having the state cover fare expenses for commuters, it firstly advances our climate goals. Public transit is a key strategy in reducing emissions. In fact, as a member of the Transportation Working Group on the Maine Climate Council, we identified in our final strategy that we need to expand the state's funding for public transportation services, which can be found on page 31 of the report (6). Zero fares means that public transit will most definitely be used more. For example, in the city of Denver they implemented zero fares and their ridership increased by 36%, which ultimately reduced emissions. Now, with respect to other challenges, zero fares mean that my generation (and certainly many other Mainers) will have access to a highly affordable mode of commute. This drives down transportation costs and starts to break down the barriers of access. Although there are certainly other measures this committee needs to take in order to improve public transit, LD 408 is a significant step in the right direction of reforming our current transportation system. Therefore, I urge the committee to vote "ought to pass" on this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

(1) [https://climatecouncil.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/MaineWait\\_EXSum.pdf](https://climatecouncil.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/MaineWait_EXSum.pdf)

(2) <https://www.bts.dot.gov/sites/bts.dot.gov/files/states2020/Maine.pdf>

(3) <https://newsroom.aaa.com/2022/08/annual-cost-of-new-car-ownership-crosses-10k-mark/>

(4) <https://www.planetizen.com/node/60908>

(5) <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/me/maine/news/2022/12/29/maine-s-minimum-wage-to-hit-13-80-on-jan--1#.~text=In%202021%2C%20about%2079%2C000%20Mainers,the%20Maine%20Department%20of%20Labor>

(6) Transportation Working Group- Final Strategy (See committee clerk for report)