

Good afternoon Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the behalf of LD 1525. My name is Tony DiMarco and I live in Freeport. I represent the Freeport Wood Bank and I am also a co-founder of the Maine Wood Banks Network. The Freeport Wood Bank is one of the newest wood banks in the state, and we operate on an acre of land at the Freeport Recycling Center that was generously granted to us by the town of Freeport.

Every Saturday we host a small crew of volunteers who work hard to haul logs, split them, and then stack the firewood. These are community building events, as volunteers can see the tangible results of their labor and the positive impact that this firewood will have on households in our community. In the fall and throughout the winter we deliver the firewood to people in need. As you've heard, their circumstances are often desperate, but their gratitude is resounding and rewarding.

Heating with firewood is a tradition and a part of people's quality of life. There are actions people can take to burn wood safely and efficiently. Wood is plentiful, it's renewable, and we make it available. For many Mainers, receiving free wood is their best option for staying warm.

I urge you to support this bill because of its focus on wood bank awareness which is generally lacking throughout the state, even in towns like Freeport where wood banks exist. The bill also creates a foundation for what can be a critical resource for our communities. It will help us generate donations of wood and funding, and it will help us recruit volunteers. And perhaps most importantly it will motivate more communities to start their own wood banks.

At the same time, I can tell you that the barriers to entry for wood banks can be high because of the costs of equipment, insurance, and supplies, and there are no longer any targeted sources of funding for wood bank startups. Unfortunately this financial barrier can be insurmountable for some groups who are interested in starting a wood bank in their community. So while I believe this bill is an important step, I also think it is **just a first** step in creating a broad and sustainable network of wood banks in our state.

I mentioned at the start of my comments that I am a co-founder of the Maine Wood Banks Network. It is a state-wide organization that serves as the non-profit sponsor for Freeport Wood Bank, and has proven to be invaluable as a general resource for expertise and shared equipment. You will hear more about that next.

Thank you for the hard work that you do in support of the people of Maine. I hope that you will support this important bill.

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