

Anthony Aman
Downeast Woodbank
Penobscot, Maine
LD 1525

Sen. Ross, Rep. Pluecker and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

My name is Anthony Aman. I am a board member of the Down East Wood Bank in Surry. I live in the Town of Penobscot. Thank you for considering passing this legislation to promote wood banks in Maine.

Compared to some other wood banks we are a small operation but we have a big job to do. We started only three years ago on land generously provided by the Blue Hill Heritage Trust. With the dedicated efforts of our small board of directors, we are now a 501c3, we built some storage buildings, we have two splitting machines, some chainsaws, and lots of wheelbarrows. Throughout the winter we met nearly every Saturday morning, splitting, stacking, and loading cars and trucks with firewood.

We do not require our recipients to reveal their financial information or to explain why they are in need. That is none of our business. Most often they will offer a description of their circumstances, which sometimes are heartbreaking. We were contacted by the pastor of a local church who had just visited an elderly couple. He noticed they were wearing outdoor clothing indoors. They said their furnace was broken and had no money to fix it.

You get to know your neighbors a little better when you are loading their pickup trucks. One young family lives in an uninsulated cabin, no refrigeration, electricity run with a generator when they have fuel. Both adults are employed but earn barely enough to make ends meet. We are their lifeline during winter months.

During the 2022-2023 heating season we gave away about 18 cords of wood. This past season, about 104 cords. We hope to double that amount for next heating season.

I am sure you are aware of the recent cuts the Feds imposed on the LIHEAP program. We are expecting the demand for firewood will only increase as a result of this short-sighted decision. We also expect more people will begin using firewood who might not be aware of the safety considerations such as installing smoke detectors and cleaning the chimney regularly. Expect more news reports of chimney fires, and asphyxiations in the coming years. The net result is not cost savings but more strain on our fire departments and emergency services, and of course lives lost.

This bill will be a great boost to our work. The population of the towns we serve is about 17,000. This winter we served 208 families. We cannot possibly fill the increasing need without more neighboring towns establishing woodbanks. And we are here to help do that by providing start-up assistance and advice. It is in everybody's self interest to pass this legislation. Thank you.