



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**Testimony of Representative Melanie Sachs in support of
LD 1525, An Act to Promote Firewood Banks in Maine
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Melanie Sachs, and I am honored to represent the community of Freeport in the Maine Legislature. I am before you today to express my strong support of **LD 1525, An Act to Promote Firewood Banks in Maine**.

On December 14, 2023, my constituent Tony Dimarco sent an email to me, which began “Hi Melanie- It's your neighbor.... I have an interest in creating a wood bank to provide heating assistance for the residents of Freeport (likely Durham and Pownal) and I was hoping to get some advice from you...”

I connected him that day with the newly formed (at the time) wood bank in Cumberland, and they were off. One year later — after securing operating space, obtaining grant money for equipment, building a website, making connections with our local social service provider for referrals, recruiting volunteers, receiving and preparing donated wood and many, many long hours — the Freeport Wood Bank was up and running, spreading warmth and connecting community, one neighbor at a time.

LD 1525 takes this informal process and provides critical support to make it easier for other Maine towns to start a wood bank in their own communities.

This is not just a feel-good community initiative. The handful of community wood banks in our state fill a critical need. The Maine Home Energy Burden Study released in December 2024 indicates that 50% of Maine households use firewood for some heat source, with 10% using it exclusively. Low-income households in Maine are facing total energy burdens of 30% of household income. This burden includes spending on electricity, household fuels and transportation energy, and is triple the total energy burden faced by all Maine households. As the House chair of the Legislative Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee, I am acutely aware of the many factors that are influencing total energy burden, and the efforts to reduce that burden on all Mainers, particularly those who have lower incomes.

I am also aware of the impact this assistance has on those who receive it. I have been a licensed clinical social worker for 30 years and was the Executive Director of Freeport Community Services (FCS), arranging for fuel assistance for those in my community, including wood. I know how this critical support helps the most vulnerable in our community. That load of wood can be the difference between staying warm or struggling in a cold home.

On the Freeport Wood Bank's website, they note their mission is "grounded in community spirit and mutual care," coming together "to make sure everyone stays warm during Maine's cold months." The need is great, and the time is now. I urge the committee to come together and vote to support this growing network of organizations.