Testimony before the Maine State Legislature's
Committee on State and Local Government
On LD #872 – Gray Cox, 4/28,2025

Thank you for this opportunity!

I teach Philosophy at College of the Atlantic and research ethical and policy questions posed by Generative AI that can converse like a person – and, increasingly, act in the world as an autonomous agent.

My students have studied exciting ways state and local government officials, local business people and researchers at, for example, Jackson Lab use AI for collaborative writing. I work with an AI committee for our local schools to explore exciting AI tools transforming teachers' practices. I give talks at public libraries to folks excited by AI breakthroughs in acoustics and animal communication. But amidst the excitement, there's lots of anxiety. Are these tools introducing bias and discrimination? Unacceptable carbon footprints and toxic waste? Hallucinated facts and deep fakes? Online fraud and bullying? Tools for cyberterrorism and autonomous lethal weapons? Manipulation of government agencies that radically overstep their authority and disrupt countless lives?

Other concerns? Most R& D for AI focuses on making systems "smarter" without making them genuinely wiser, something explained in this book of mine I am submitting.[i]

Further, much AI is being offered for "free" or subsidized by advertisers and data merchants who are, in effect, making the behavior of the people using AI into the product being bought and sold.[ii]

Further, Big Tech companies are pushing the power of "black box" AI systems beyond our ability to understand them or control them. Their CEO's admit it. Leading AI researchers are so concerned they opened the new International Association for Safe and Ethical AI (IASEAI) with calls to stop research on Agentic AI because it is beginning to develop autonomous goals, resist the programming of its values, and practice deception to escape it.[iii]

Here in Maine, we can and should ensure our state and local government only use AI systems that are ethical, legal, and safe AND that they make access to such systems available to all because in every workplace, school, clinic, and civic arena, AI in one form or another is becoming inescapable.

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[i] Besides the hardcopy versions being submitted today as supplements to my testimony, *Smarter Planet or Wiser Earth? Dialogue and Collaboration in the Era of Artificial*

Intelligence is also available in a freely downloadable pdf as a Creative Commons version at: http://www.smarterplanetorwiserearth.com/.

[ii] This point is developed further in an op-ed of mine in the MDIslander: https://www.mdislander.com/opinion/commentary/who-will-call-the-ai-piper-s-tune/article_39db4238-c1bf-_11ed-8863-53e1446b514d.html

[iii] These core concerns are elaborated briefly in my op-ed in the Portland Press Herald: Portland Press Herald: https://www.pressherald.com/2023/03/28/maine-voices-can-congress-encourage-wiser-ai/ For a very recent series of key note speeches on these themes at the IASEAI, see, for instance the talks by Yoshua Bengio at the opening session and Stuart Russell at the closing session: https://www.iaseai.org/conference/livestream