

From:
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To:

Sansbury J

Senator Baldacci, Representative Westbrook, and Honorable Members of the State and Local Government Committee

In RE: LD-1394, An Act to Promote Responsible Outdoor Lighting - *in support*

My name is Elizabeth Dickerson, and I am the founder of the Maine Aurora Borealis Watch, an Aurora Alerts and Space Weather forecasting group on Facebook.

I started this group in 2021, just me and one other member, and now I have four other people on my admin team and 65,000 members.

Our group functions as an Aurora Borealis alert page and an educational source for all things Space Weather.

When most new members join, they know very little about the night sky, astronomy, space, or weather, but in time, many learn night photography and how to read space weather forecasting tools. Perhaps more importantly, all members have gained an understanding of the importance of the dark sky in seeing an aurora. People love auroras, and through the aurora borealis, the members of our group have gained an appreciation of the majesty and beauty that we know and love here in Maine.

But before I wax too lyrical, let me bring good economic news. When we push out an Aurora Alert, hundreds if not thousands of people leap into action across our state, heading out to find a perfect viewing site. Also, many people travel to our state if the three-day forecast looks promising. All these people are purchasing food, supplies, and gas, and many of them are staying overnight at motels or B and Bs. We often field questions on the group such as, where can I stay? Where is a good place to eat? Where can we re-supply?

Even if just a small percentage of those 65,000 people are out Aurora Hunting, it can be a significant boost to the economy of a small Maine town in the off seasons, which is when we are generally out there.

However, in the past four years of running our group, the increase in light pollution has been impossible to ignore. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find Aurora viewing locations given the increasing light pollution in our state.

I've often taken pride in Maine appearing as a Dark Sky haven on NOAA radar maps. However, these past few years, I've been watching the Dark Sky region grow smaller and smaller. I'm very concerned that we're missing a chance to do something positive. Sometimes it can feel overwhelming when confronted with major ecological issues, but light pollution is one issue we can address without a seismic shift. And today you have learned that there is an economic benefit to addressing light pollution: Aurora hunters spend money in Maine and stay in Maine. Thank you for listening to my testimony.