



To: Joint Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

From: Hallie Arno, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: March 18, 2021

Re: Testimony in support of LD 471 **An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands**

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and Members of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Hallie Arno and I proudly write as a representative for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 300 youth from across the state who are fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. I am writing in support of L.D. 471, An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands.

Maine is known for its pristine forests and beautiful landscapes. Public lands are central to our economy and our natural and cultural heritage—whether it be hiking in Acadia National Park, paddling through Katahdin Woods and Waters, or visiting one of the 32 state parks across 500,000 acres of protected land, these spaces define our state. They support our tourism and natural resource based economy, hold our history, and are a place for us to recreate and connect to nature.

The lands we love and have worked to protect could be threatened. One of these projects infringing on the land that belongs to all of us is the Central Maine Power (CMP) corridor as part of the New England Clean Energy Connect project (NECEC). Some of the land these transmission lines would pass through, and would forever alter, is public land, shared by the people of Maine, yet those who would profit most from the project likely live in Spain (where CMP’s parent company is based), Québec (where the energy is sourced from), or Massachusetts (where the energy would be delivered to). This bill, ensuring that these types of leases on public lands get a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote in the legislature, would create a safety net to ensure that alterations of use to public lands would truly benefit the state of Maine. It is currently in the Maine State

Constitution that a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote must approve any substantial alteration of lands held by the state, so this bill clarifies and enforces the existing constitutional right.

The decision to lease these lands to CMP was made without the full input of Maine's people. The construction of the CMP corridor would fragment wildlife habitat, limit recreation opportunities, and destroy scenic qualities, undermining the very purposes that we preserved the land for. We need to set the precedent of a robust public process when leases are granted. This bill is needed to clarify that a transmission line cut through the forest is a significant alteration of the land's use.

L.D. 471 also presents an issue of democracy. Public lands belong to us, the public, and should not be leased for private benefit without proper due process. As youth, the decisions made now will impact our future. The lease of public lands for the CMP corridor will set a precedent for out of state companies to control what happens in our forests. L.D. 471 would give some of the power to make decisions about the uses of these lands back to Mainers. We hope you will seriously consider this decision's lasting impact on Maine's environment and its communities. MYCJ encourages your decisive action. Protecting public lands means having forethought for future generations to enjoy the natural beauty we are lucky enough to be stewards of.

For the above reasons, our coalition, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, urges you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 471 to protect our public lands.

Thank you for your consideration.

Hallie Arno, Maine Youth for Climate Justice.