



To: Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

From: Hallie Arno on behalf of Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: 8 March 2021

Re: Testimony in support of L.D. 489: RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and Members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

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 strong support of L.D. 489: Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment.

Breathing clean air is the most basic of human needs, followed by access to clean drinking water. These must be human rights, for everyone. Our state constitution must reflect this. Furthermore, we must look beyond today and guarantee these rights for future generations, and the only way to assuredly safeguard this right is by ensuring the health of the ecosystems that support all life on this planet. Protecting ecosystems includes and transcends human needs; it protects plants, animals, and the earth itself.

MYCJ recognizes the existential threat that climate change poses to our futures and to all future generations. Maine will continue to experience negative effects of climate change. Increased unpredictable precipitation will lead to further flooding, sea level rise will erode and flood our coasts, storms will cause power outages, polluted waters will be undrinkable. This will have profound repercussions on our communities. Though we must reduce emissions, we also must mitigate these adverse impacts of the climate crisis. Thriving environments are more resilient—for example, healthy estuaries can absorb excess water and nutrients, and diverse ecosystems are less likely to collapse with the loss of a single species. By protecting our land, water, and air, we create more resilient ecosystems and therefore resilient communities. The climate is changing now, mitigation is non-optional.



Protecting Maine’s environment means protecting our people, history, and economy. Along with natural resources, Maine’s thriving tourism industry would not exist without a pristine environment, since people visit Maine from all over the world to hike in our forests, swim in our clean waters, and eat fresh local food. Because of Maine’s reliance on the environment, we must be leaders in pushing other states to take aggressive action on climate change and minimizing environmental harm. Through inaction, the state our children would inherit could look like one of the many states that have been overtaken by industrialization, with polluted air, lack of drinking water, few open spaces, and communities suffering. Maine can, should, and must be better. Pennsylvania and Montana have already passed similar constitutional resolutions, and 11 other states are working on them. We are not alone, but now is the time to act, not only for Maine, but to show other states what must be done.

MYCJ acknowledges that the climate crisis is rooted in systemic failures and forms of oppression, and disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Many of those who have contributed least to the climate crisis are likely those who will be most affected. LD 489 is a first step in mitigating harm to the environment and supporting Maine’s most vulnerable communities. It will ensure that all Mainers have access to a healthy environment, regardless of class, race, or background. This is not just an issue of the environment, this is an issue of justice.

Connection to the natural world—fishing, farming, hunting, and recreation— is central to Maine heritage and culture. Many of us grew up surrounded by Maine’s natural beauty, and hope to pass it on to our children. Now is the time to cement our legacy as environmental stewards into the constitution.

As youth, we will live to see the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. If we do not act, it will be us and our children who will not have clean air to breathe, water to drink, or functioning ecosystems to rely on. We will feel the effects of a crisis we did not create. It is critical that we take action now to protect the environment, and therefore our futures.

Respectfully,

Hallie Arno on behalf of Maine Youth for Climate Justice