



Senator Richard A. Bennett
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0003
Office (207) 287-1505
Cell (207) 592-3200
Richard.Bennett@legislature.maine.gov

Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Government Oversight Committee

Testimony of Senator Richard Bennett
before the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
LD 489, RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine
To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment
March 8, 2021

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and esteemed colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources: My name is Rick Bennett, I live in Oxford, and I have the honor of representing the beautiful foothills and lakes region of western Maine in the Maine Senate. I am pleased to cosponsor LD 489, “RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment”—also known as the Pine Tree Amendment.

The proposed Amendment is predicated on the fact that a core condition of human life and core to our state’s identity is a healthy environment and a clean outdoors. This Amendment will hold our government accountable to protect these as basic rights.

The Pine Tree Amendment would be added to Article I., the Declaration of Rights in the Maine Constitution. This enumeration of rights therefore precedes the mechanisms and applications of governmental powers, the checks and balances, the legal definitions which follow. Indeed, the expression of these rights foremost in our founding document is designed as a limitation on the governmental power that is thereafter constructed.

The Declaration of Rights are the bedrock principles and legal protections that you can expect if you live in Maine. The Pine Tree Amendment fits comfortably and contentedly in this context. What commonality is more important for Mainers than our bountiful, beautiful outdoors – the clean winds of Katahdin, the lapping waves of Sebago, the bends of coastal shoreline? What says Maine more than cross-country skiing on a crisp March morning, dipping your paddle in Chesuncook Lake, feeling the earth awaken around your tree stand in November, traversing the boulders of Mahoosuc Notch, or hearing the buoy bell at eventide?

Our way of life in Maine demands recognition and protection as a right of the people. Sadly, our government has shown that it cannot always be trusted. Sometimes its policies are swayed unduly by centers of influence, such as globe-straddling corporations that may think of Maine as a market, as a means to an end, rather than as the unique place it is, where there is a special interconnectedness between the people and the lands and waters on which we live, play, work, and find sustenance. Thus, the Pine Tree Amendment will help safeguard the harmonizing elements of our way of life, our shared values and our common culture.

I ask for your favorable consideration and thank you for your attention.