

**To:** Environment and Natural Resources Committee

**From:** Jess Cooper of the Center for an Ecology-based Economy's Norway Youth Climate Action team

**Date:** March 8th, 2021

**Re:** Testimony in strong support of LD 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 ENR Committee (with grateful recognition to Senator Bennett in my district for corresponding with me and co-sponsoring this bill):

My name is Jess Cooper, I am 25 years old, I'm from Norway, Maine and I'm urging you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 489: RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment.

I am a young mother, and a youth climate action coordinator in western Maine. I enjoy working with youth all over the state, acting as a bridge between young people and adults to share and amplify what young people are experiencing.

The person that I am inspired to advocate for most is my daughter. In 2015 my daughter Adelaide was born with a rare genetic disorder called Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS).

People born with this genetic disorder have the same core symptoms: Low muscle tone, inability to feed at birth, and then, as they grow, it changes to include hyperphagia, a phenomenon where the brain causes them to experience insatiable hunger - at all times.

The health issues that come with this diagnosis can be numerous - one of the most prominent being obesity, caused by the uncontrollable hunger and low muscle tone making it more difficult to do strenuous activities for even short amounts of time.

**Getting my daughter outside every day is critical for her well being, as well as having access to pure water, healthy local foods, and safe, thriving outdoor spaces to explore and exercise in.** We see well over 10 specialty doctors regularly, and the one thing they all echo is to get my daughter outside, playing and moving as much as possible.

10 years from now she will be 15 and will be old enough to advocate for a safe and livable future - until then, my voice is her voice and I have the opportunity to make an impact on her future now by working to establish her undeniable right to a healthy environment. **No law, permit, or corporation should be able to jeopardize those rights and it scares me that currently they can.**

It is up to us to protect our environment, to ensure that our beautiful state is clean, to advocate for the health of our friends, family, and neighbors, and to hold our government accountable. **Everyone deserves the right to clean air, pure water, and a healthy environment around them and my daughter's direct need for those things is what drives me to advocate for this amendment to Maine's constitution.**

In Maine, some of the first places we have an opportunity to find wonder, learn about ourselves, breathe deeply, and begin to build healthy lives is outside - maybe under an old maple or pine tree, in a leaf pile, on a trail or a mountain, beside a lake or the ocean, under our very first snowflakes or a perfect bluebird sky.

I am asking each of you to think back to your first moments of wonder outside, to consider that *you and your children and friends and neighbors, too*, should have a right to that healthy environment, and to support LD 489 and see our constitution amended to guarantee these rights, regardless of age, income, race, medical condition, or background, to each and every person in the state of Maine.

**With gratitude,**

Jess Cooper

*Center for an Ecology-based Economy*

*Norway Youth Climate Action*

*Maine Youth for Climate Justice*

*Maine Climate Action NOW!*