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My name is Leif Maynard; I'm a sophomore studying Government at Bowdoin College and a member of the Sunrise Movement, a youth-led movement to stop climate change and create millions of good jobs in the process. I am writing this committee to urge the passage of LD489, the Pine Tree Amendment. I write not only as a climate justice advocate, but also simply as a young person who has fallen in love with Maine and is considering starting a career here after college. Enshrining the right to a healthy environment in the Maine Constitution would demonstrate the state's sincere commitment to preserving--in the law--its treasured natural beauty and way of life far into the future. The abundant recreational opportunities provided by Maine's pristine forests, rivers, and shoreline are some of the state's most vital economic and cultural resources, attracting young people like me to root themselves here and start families.

Not only is adopting this amendment the right move from an economic and environmental perspective, it would also advance the cause of justice in Maine, establishing powerful legal standing for Indigenous and other communities who have been denied access to clean water and air. The Pine Tree Amendment will empower these communities to address this infringement on environmental rights by providing constitutional grounding for their advocacy and access to the courts for redress. This is a big deal.

As a foundational social and legal contract, Maine's constitution should reflect the values and rights of its citizens. Backed by a multi-partisan, multi-racial, multi-class coalition, this amendment reflects the values of so many Mainers who understand the importance of taking care of this place and each other. The right to a healthy environment is one of the most natural rights I can think of, and the Pine Tree Amendment would help ensure every Mainer has access to clean water, fresh air, and a liveable future not just right now, but for generations to come.