

March 7, 2021

**Testimony in SUPPORT of L.D. 489
Environment and Natural Resources Committee**

Greetings to the Chairs, Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and Members of the Committee,
Special thanks to Senator Bennett of my home town in Oxford county for co-sponsoring this bill.

It is a great pleasure to offer my **enthusiastic SUPPORT of L.D. 489 -a Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment.**

I am a Biologist, wetland scientist, and Restoration Ecologist that works to protect, connect, and restore our waterways and to ensure clean water, resilient communities, and a healthy environment for all species, every day.

I grew up in a farmhouse on a hill, surrounded by an apple orchard, acres of fields, forests, wetlands, rolling hills, ponds, streams, and springs in western Maine. The ancient apple, pear, sugar maple, ash and cedar trees that stood like sentinels around our home housed the crows and fed the deer and turkeys and as I grew I developed a relationship with generations of their offspring. Mating Barred owls would call through the woods, harbingers of spring, soon to be followed by spring peepers and the smell of mud. As the sun grew higher in the sky toward summer, loon calls would echo the owls at night, as fireflies danced across the fields and a warm breeze carried the heavy smell of water in the thick night air.

These sounds and smells. These species of flora and fauna are as much a part of me as the blood in my veins. They have carried me through broken heartedness, longing, searching, seeking, and always provided me a home. When I swim in Saturday Pond or Pleasant Lake I am communing with purity, freedom, and sheer joy. I can get lost in the sky and revel in the crystal-clear waters that support so much life within and around their shores.

My childhood home has the best water. Often, I would come inside with the fresh air in my hair and drink straight from the faucet, knowing that the cleanliness and refreshment was ensured, and, being a little bit of a wild thing, I liked that it made me feel closer with the deer I watched so regularly in our orchard. I knew the places in the woods where they could drink. It was the way life should be.

But things have changed. I moved away, discovered the horrible taste of chlorinated water. Suffered the loss of nature's sounds while living in apartment surrounded by parking lots, cars, and traffic noise. With great sadness I have witnessed the inequities that poor communities, indigenous communities, black and brown communities suffer without access to clean water, clean air, green and wild spaces.

All too often I have concerned Mainer's reach out to me to assist with protecting a wetland or water source or to save an important neighborhood forest, only to be helpless to help them because regulations were followed. Permits were granted. We live in a state where it's accepted practice to pay to pollute. But those who pay the true costs are not the ones polluting.

We need the Pine Tree Amendment (PTA) to ensure that all communities, regardless of race, ethnicity or income -have the same rights to clean water, clean air, and healthy environments and that it will be the DUTY of all government officials to protect all communities equitably. We need the PTA to provide the

broad guidance that ensures government decision making—substantively and procedurally—considers environmental impacts EARLY in the process when PREVENTION of POLLUTION, DEGRADATION, and ENVIRONMENTAL HARM is most possible.

As someone who works day and night to ensure clean water, clean air, a stable climate, and healthy environment is ensured for all generations, I ask you to join me. Please vote **in favor of L.D. 489**.

Sincerely,

Shri A. Verrill, M.S. Biology
Boothbay