

Tom Berry
Kennebunk
LD 928

March 22, 2023

To: Senator Stacy Brenner, Representative Lori Gramlich, and Honorable members of the committee

From: Tom Berry

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 928, a Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment

Thank you all for considering this testimony. My name is Tom Berry and I live in Kennebunk. I am writing as a retired educator and concerned citizen to urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 928.

As mentioned, I am a retired educator - specifically, a speech-language pathologist - and I worked in Special Education in the Kennebunk school system for over 25 years and out-of-state, for 4 years before that.

These days I spend much of my time as a volunteer with some environmental organizations: one, a small grassroots group in Kennebunk called the Planeteers of Southern Maine and another, the Portland chapter of a national non-partisan nonprofit: Citizens' Climate Lobby.

My path from the first occupation to the second was quite direct: After I became aware of the unfolding Climate Crisis in 2006, whenever I observed young students, say, out on the playground or just walking down a hallway innocently oblivious to the looming threat, I often found myself wondering:

"What kind of world will these kids be inheriting from us?"

I'm sure you've all had this experience at one time or another.

The sharp poignancy of those moments has never left me and for the final years of my professional life - and afterwards - I determined to use energy derived from anxiety about what could be a very dark future to get out and help do something about it.

Now, some might point out that Maine's contribution to the primary cause of Climate Change is minimal. To be precise, our state's carbon emissions account for less than 0.3 percent of the nation's total output and, compared to that of the whole world, the fraction is beyond microscopic. And they might then understandably ask:

"How does advocating for the Pine Tree Amendment in Maine make any difference in the global Climate Crisis?"

To them, I would say that,.... practically speaking in the near term ?

Probably not much.

But, having a destabilized Climate with high potential for global catastrophe does not mean that regional environmental concerns have suddenly vanished or become unimportant. Far from it.

The natural features of our home state: the lands and waters, the ecosystems within them, and the air we breathe continue to be at risk and, as negative effects of Climate Change increase, those vulnerabilities will only become more stark.

And this is why Now is the exact time that bolstered protection of these features - that are so iconic of the spirit of Maine and which form the foundation upon which our state's economy is built - should be raised to the status of a Constitutional Right.

As such, it would be recognized as an undergirding principle that exists beyond the vicissitudes of politics.

This is not a gift to bestow on future generations, it is our solemn obligation.

Respectfully submitted,
Tom Berry