

Karen Prieto
Brunswick
LD 928

03/21/23

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

From: Karen Prieto, she/ her/ Mx, Brunswick

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

My name is Karen Staples Prieto, and I ask you to please vote "ought to pass" on LD 928.

As an only child growing up on River Road in Topsham, my hangouts were any undeveloped area that I could reach on my bike. The pine grove and steep gully behind my house; the quarries and power lines near Mallet drive, the farmlands on Meadow Road. A special favorite was the area northeast of the rail line - a realm filled with blueberry shrubs, frog bogs with cattails, and mysterious sandy sinkholes.

Like most of my childhood haunts, that area has long since been developed into a shopping center, but I did not witness the transformation: My connection to our natural world was set aside when I moved to Orlando for school and worked my way back up the East Coast building a career.

Not until I returned to Maine in 2019, joining my mother in Brunswick's Willow Grove, did I realize what I was missing. Breathing the clear air one evening brought back the amazing natural connection that I lost after moving out of state. I started a community pollinator garden and discovered the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust's amazing trails. I hear birds in the mornings and frogs at night, and I feel at home once again. Without these elements, Maine would not be Maine - the natural world is an inseparable part of who we are as a state.

I'm worried that we are losing our critical natural elements at an accelerating pace. Last week I attended a Friends of Merrymeeting Bay webinar about alarming decreases in bird and bat populations. A couple weeks before that, I learned about Maine Big Night and the need to protect amphibians during spring migrations. Before that, bees and other pollinator insects. The bad news is piling up. I'm afraid that if we don't draw the line and prioritize climate and the environment, it will be too late.

Like many Mainers, I'm trying to do my part by buying local, sustainably-farmed food, composting, recycling, steering away from plastics, and driving less. But my and others' efforts could be undermined at any time by ignorance, corporate greed, or hastily-made, uninformed legislative decisions.

I believe Mainers critically need the Pine Tree Amendment to ensure that environmental impacts will come first in all proposed legislation, and that this environment-first philosophy remains solidly in place for future generations and administrations.

The PTA will guide our government to look closely at the environmental impact of all proposals up front, thereby maximizing our ability to avoid environmental harm. One example of the importance of the PTA is the proposed lithium mine in Newry*: Investing time to examine scientifically-informed information and identify the most environmentally-sound approach could protect against irreversible damage and future regrets.

Let's not wait until we've lost our natural connection to realize how much we value it - protect it now by elevating environmental protections to a constitutional right. Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 928.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Karen Prieto

* Cough, K. (2023, March 14). "Couple hoping to mine lithium deposit in Newry urge lawmakers to "clarify" state mining laws." The Maine Monitor. Retrieved March 21,

2023 from

<https://www.themainemonitor.org/couple-hoping-to-mine-lithium-deposit-in-newry-urge-lawmakers-to-clarify-state-mining-laws>