



To: Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

From: Ezra Sassaman, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: April 24, 2023

Re: Testimony in favor of LD 1621: An Act Regarding Environmental Justice

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Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and the members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Ezra Sassaman. I am writing as a representative for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 460 youth from across the state who are fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. I am writing in favor of LD 1621.

MYCJ, founded on the principle of climate justice, recognizes the climate crisis will not affect everyone the same way due to continuously reinforced inequities and an unfair and unequal distribution of resources. We also recognize those affected most by the climate crisis must have an opportunity to participate and lead in discussions, decision-making processes, and the implementation of climate solutions.

Communities that are low-income, adversely racialized, in rural areas, and/or whose income sources are most threatened by the climate crisis are examples of groups who often face a disproportionate share of the state's environmental, energy, and transportation burdens. Many of these same groups face significant barriers to participating in decision-making processes when climate solutions are discussed.

Therefore, we support LD 1621 because this legislation will begin officially defining environmental justice groups in Maine. We also support funding of facilitator services, travel expenses, facility rentals and meeting expenses through this legislation with the hope these funds will make it easier for environmental justice communities to engage in Department of Environmental Protection decision-making processes. We see this legislation as an important

first step to eventually implement the full recommendations of the 2022 Maine Climate Council Equity Subcommittee “Procedural Equity” section.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, it is important to recognize the importance of public engagement in decision-making around the climate crisis is not limited to a single department. This session alone, MYCJ and other environmental justice groups have supported legislation related to climate justice spanning from Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Education and Cultural Affairs to Energy, Utilities and Technology to Judiciary to Labor and Housing to Transportation.

While LD 1621 is limited to the Department of Environmental Protection, we additionally support expanding the scope of this legislation beyond a single department to encourage public participation in environmental justice issues in all departments who guide policy around renewable energy, housing, transportation, and other issues that directly affect environmental justice communities.

For the above reasons, our coalition, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, urges you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 1621. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Equity Subcommittee, “[Initial Recommendations of the Equity Subcommittee](#)”, *Maine Climate Council*, February 2022, Accessed April 24, 2023, page 15.

- a. Provide stipends to frontline and disadvantaged community members for their time, which can help members of these communities take time off work or away from other critical activities to participate in decision-making processes;*
- b. Providing transportation and childcare in order to allow overburdened Maine people to attend meetings and participate in climate decision processes;*
- c. Producing materials in languages other than English, and following communications guidance per the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title II;*
- d. Producing “plain language” guides that help explain decisions or decision-making processes;*
- e. Including representative participants of impacted groups in program design processes, including clean energy and resilience and adaptation planning;*
- f. Utilizing existing social networks to engage communities in state decision-making, and in marketing existing programs and incentives;*
- g. Adjusting meeting times and locations including allowing for ongoing virtual participation in meetings;*
- h. Where possible, considering adoption of a consensus building approach for decision-making.*