

Date: March 28, 2023

To: Transportation Committee

From: Cole Cochrane, Maine Youth Action

Re: Testimony Neither For nor Against LD 259, *An Act Making Unified Allocations from the Highway Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025*



Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and the distinguished members of the Transportation Committee,

My name is Cole Cochrane, I am a senior at Thornton Academy in Saco, and I am testifying on behalf of Maine Youth Action, a statewide youth advocacy group that represents hundreds of young Mainers across the state from various backgrounds. I am here to testify neither for nor against LD 259, otherwise known as the Transportation Budget.

I would like to preface my testimony by saying that we are facing a climate crisis, and Maine has not escaped those disastrous effects. Climate change impacts our environment, our natural resource industries, as well as the overall integrity of our local communities. In light of this, the state must do its part to respond to climate change and reverse those effects. As you all are aware of, the largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Maine is from the transportation sector. In fact, according to Maine Won't Wait, 54% of emissions come from transportation. It is also no coincidence that we are overly dependent on private vehicles. Based on a MaineDOT report, 78% of commuters use single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) to get to work, while only 0.6% use public transit, far below the national average. In order to reduce our emissions, it'll take more than the electrification of vehicles; after all, EVs are expensive even when subsidized and are not accessible for all Mainers. Therefore, we ought to also prioritize the state's investment in public transportation. Public transit emits significantly fewer emissions per capita in comparison

to cars. For example, a diesel powered bus emits 33% less than a car, and an electric bus emits 53% less. Considering how public transit in Maine is severely underutilized, there is so much potential to invest into it and make it a powerful tool to combat climate change.

Furthermore, for my generation, it is not only about our climate. It is also about making an investment into our communities in order for them to be sustainable and accessible. Considering the influx of federal funding, the state has a golden opportunity to make public transit an affordable, reliable, and convenient mode of transportation. It is the responsibility of decision makers today to invest into my generation's future. I encourage the committee to look favorably on Maine Transit Association's request to increase transit operating funds to \$6.8 million annually. I would like to also emphasize that this step is to simply maintain transit operations in light of reduced federal aid. There is a bill, LR 1777, which has not yet been printed, but will call for more operating funding to support expanded public transit services. I also encourage the committee to look favorably upon that bill when the time comes. Thank you for your time and effort on this.