

Good afternoon to the members of the Transportation Committee and thank you very much for your work on LD 1559 "An Act to Advance the State's Public Transit Systems by Reinvigorating the Public Transit Advisory Council and Increasing Funding". *I am here today to support this bill.*

My name is Sarah Cushman and my family and I live in Portland. Originally, I was born and raised in a rural community in the Midcoast area. I'm a walker, bus rider, and a year-round bike commuter – and I also put my bike on the bus to travel longer distances. I serve as the Faith Representative on the Moving Maine Network's Steering Committee, through my membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). I'm also a transportation planning consultant specializing in public transportation, pedestrian, and bicycle projects.

In my experience, this bill is about equal access to opportunity - for our local workforce and economy, and for our own quality of life. It's a basic fairness issue. For example, I rode the bus for several years to get to work and in my travels, I was accompanied by many others who needed the bus to reach local jobs, workforce training and other services. And my 16-year-old daughter and her peers are fortunate enough to be able to get to their after-school jobs and learning activities via the year-round METRO bus pass that they receive from the Portland Public Schools.

In my volunteering with the Moving Maine Network, I've learned how the Community Caring Collaborative and Downeast Community Partners (the local CAP agency) did extensive work to identify significant barriers to transportation for people living in Washington County. One of the key findings was people in the recovery community who lacked transportation to get back into the workforce and pursue new jobs - and local businesses interested in partnering to fill much needed vacant positions. The agencies are still interested in finding a way to provide public transportation options for these folks and need funding support.

Another example I've learned about is through my previous work with the GO MAINE statewide commuter assistance program. The Maine Community College system's Workforce Development Program does excellent short-term training modules to get participants ready for entry-level jobs – for example, welding jobs at Bath Iron Works or medical jobs at Eastern Maine Medical Center. These month-long programs essentially guarantee a job at the end of them for people who actively and competently participate the whole way through to completion. And those jobs often enable the participants to buy a car to get to their new job on a regular basis. But the Community College system has found that *transportation to the training itself is one of the key barriers* to people being able to participate, and thus aren't able to access the training or the subsequent job opportunity.

We know that *roughly 40,000 households in our vast rural state do not have access to a vehicle* – and these households are more likely to be composed of people with less income, people with disabilities, people of color, immigrants, and older adults.

Speaking of income, we also know that Maine has an adverse Housing + Transportation Index rate of 68% for people with moderate incomes. So that means that *housing and transportation costs combined are 68% of household income*. This is far from the official definition of affordability, which is that combined housing and transportation costs equal 45% or less of income. The result is that many of our households are crippled by private vehicle costs.

As you're likely aware, and as is clear from speaking with federal sources and local transit providers, the one-time appropriation of funding in this bill is essential for the fiscal cliff we're approaching. Without it, local transit services will cease to serve Mainers as they currently do.

In addition, a substantial increase in public transit funding – although very small compared to what we spend on roads and bridges - is fundamental for Mainers to be able to access opportunity and maintain quality of life in our communities.

Finally, the Public Transit Advisory Council did great and active work during its first two years that lead to real change. It's critical that the Council be revitalized – and frankly, it is also mandated by the legislature.

Thank you very much for listening, for your thoughtful discernment on these critical issues, and for doing what's best for *all* the people of Maine this legislative session.