

Testimony in Support of LD 489

"RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of
Maine To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment"

"The Pine Tree Amendment"

Senator Brenner , Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee, my name is Susan Inches and I've been an environmental advocate for 25 years. I'm testifying in support of LD 489. Specifically, I want to speak with you about how the proposed Pine Tree Amendment is good for Maine's economy. Some people may tell you this constitutional amendment is bad for the economy, but I'm here to tell you the opposite is true.

In 2009 I worked on an initiative called *Quality of Place*. At the time I was serving as Deputy Director of the Maine State Planning Office. My role there was to initiate and lobby for good public policy for Maine. The idea behind Quality of Place was to build Maine's economy based on our strengths, what we called our Quality of Place Assets, meaning our forests, our lakes, our farms, coastlines, open spaces and historic cities and towns. By investing in and improving these natural assets, we could build the basis for a strong economy that would attract people and help the business sector grow.

Quality of Place legislation we initiated allowed the state to prioritize funding for projects that strengthened our natural assets--things like providing public water access to our lakes and coast, building and maintaining trails, and renovating mill buildings and our historic downtowns. The legislation also created a Quality of Place Council that could apply for and receive federal and private funds to renovate and build this infrastructure. This Quality of Place Legislation passed with bi-partisan support in 2010. Then in 2011, the legislation was repealed under Gov. Paul LePage. There are several lessons from this history that are relevant to today's discussion of LD 489:

LD 489 gives us a permanent way to protect Maine's natural assets and the health of Maine people. As you can see from the Quality of Place legislation story, laws—even laws with bi-partisan support—are not permanent. LD 489 would establish the right of all Maine citizens to clean air, clean water and a healthy environment, and it would guarantee these rights for present and future generations. If you don't pass this

bill, the health of our environment and our people is up for grabs with each swing of the political pendulum.

LD 489 gives us a way to protect and grow Maine's economy.

Maine's identity and economy are based---more than ever before---on our natural assets. Think about it: agriculture, forestry and fishing are our traditional industries, but now we have cruise ships, outdoor recreation of all kinds, hospitality, tourism and travel. I was reminded of this when I visited the north woods a couple of weeks ago. The Nordic ski lodge where I was staying was full, and snowmobiles were crowded the general store parking lot down the road. And now as a result of Covid, we are seeing a surge in new residents---both families and professionals. These people are moving to Maine because of its clean air, clean water and healthy environment.

If LD 489 passes, we would be sending a clear message to the world that the outdoors and a clean and healthy environment is our identity and our priority---for the long term. With the Pine Tree Amendment in place, an investment in Maine, whether in real estate, or to start an educational endeavor or a business, is a good and safe investment, for the long term. I'm talking here about investments in forests, farms and food products, ski areas, food and lodging, boat tours, arts, education and aquaculture. LD 489 would assure that the Maine economy grows while maintaining the Quality of Place on which it is based.

LD 489 also gives citizens a clear pathway to seek recourse if they have been harmed by environmental violations. And it gives this Committee clear guidance on how to respond to environmental hazards. Without LD 489, our competitive advantage will be eroded by harmful developments over time, and eventually lost.

In summary, we need the Pine Tree Amendment to protect ourselves from harmful development, and to tell the world we are a safe, clean and healthy place to invest, raise a family, work, or start a business. A vote in support of LD 489 is a vote for Maine's clean economy and our prosperous future.

Thank you.