



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

From: Julia St.Clair-Voiers, Sierra Club Maine

Date: February 17, 2021

Re: **Testimony in support of LD 155- Resolve, Directing the Board of Pesticides Control To Prohibit the Use of Certain Neonicotinoids for Outdoor Residential Use**

Senator Jim Dill, Representative Maggie O'Neil, and Members of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Julia St. Clair-Voiers, and I proudly write as a representative of Sierra Club's over 22,000 members and supporters across Maine and 3.8 million members and supporters nationwide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to defend everyone's right to a healthy world and to protect Maine's natural environment, and we strongly support LD 155 in our pursuit of this mission.

"I like bees." For some people, that statement elicits a cringe, but beyond their misleading reputation, inside a beehive a spectacle unfolds. Amid their tiny bodies, chaos melts into order as seamless networks of communication orchestrate a choir of wings beating toward a singular, collective goal. They represent both the fragility and resilience of our ecosystems, and the harmony that they exhibit is a microcosm of the ecosystem within which they exist. These insects have existed for over 30 million years and the key role that they play in a healthy ecosystem is undeniable.

Bees have always been a part of human history. Humans have been tending beehives for thousands of years, and while honeybees are considered to be domesticated, they can survive just fine without us. We, on the other hand, rely on honeybees to pollinate food crops that we depend on. Honeybees play an important role in our ecosystems and our food systems. Here in Maine, bees and other pollinators play a crucial role in the pollination of one of our most iconic and lucrative crops: blueberries.

Unfortunately, bee populations have been declining over the past several years. Of Maine's over 270 species of native bees, a recent study found that more than half of all populations are in decline. These trends are for a variety of reasons, including climate change, habitat loss, diseases, and importantly, pesticides. There is ample evidence which demonstrates that pesticides, such as neonicotinoids, damage bee



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populations, including studies conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency. Ongoing exposure has also been shown to weaken bees' immune systems, making them more susceptible to mites and disease. For these reasons, we must act urgently to reduce potential threats to our pollinators.

In 2018, beekeepers in Maine reported losing 46% of all honeybee colonies. As a young person aspiring to keep my own honeybees one day, I worry that the continued use of neonicotinoids may threaten this aspiration. As bee populations continue to decline, I fret that we will begin seeing the anticipated consequences of an ecosystem without them. While we can certainly expect reduced crop yields and potentially food shortages in a world without bees, I am concerned still that we may discover unknown interconnections that are even more dire.

Bees have lived in harmony with their ecosystems since time immemorial, committed to their mission of making the plants that nourish our state and its people thrive. I do not wish to see the consequences of a world without them. Banning the sale of neonicotinoids is about recognizing the value of each piece of the natural systems that we exist within, and is a step that Maryland, Vermont, and Connecticut have all taken by banning consumer sale of these chemicals. Bees, while small, are deeply interconnected with our own survival, and they always have been. As Rachel Carson wrote: "In nature nothing exists alone," and so we must recognize the need to protect bees not just on behalf of our own human existence, but on behalf of the entire ecosystem.

A bee may seem a small thing, but the loss of bees has huge implications. In order to protect bees we need to limit pesticide use, and this bill is a small step toward doing just that, working to ensure that bees will continue to thrive in Maine. By choosing to limit the sale of neonicotinoids, we would be making an important choice to preserve a key species for generations to come.

For these reasons we urge you to vote "Ought to pass" on LD 155.

Thank you for your consideration.

Julia St.Clair-Voiers

On behalf of Sierra Club Maine