



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Joint Committee on State and Local Government
From: Julia St. Clair-Voiers, Sierra Club Maine
Date: February 3, 2021
Re: **Testimony in Support of L.D. 2 An Act To Require the Inclusion of Racial Impact Statements in the Legislative Process**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and Members of the Joint Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Julia St. Clair-Voiers and I proudly write as a representative of Sierra Club Maine's over 20,000 members and supporters. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we defend everyone's right to a healthy world, and we strongly support L.D. 2 in our pursuit of that mission.

In the state of Maine, and across the country, environmental challenges constantly overlap with other issues of social inequality, particularly race. Historically, poor communities and communities of color have borne the brunt of environmental degradation. For example: A 2018 American Public Health Association study found notable disparity in air pollution exposure for communities of color, and especially Black communities, when compared to white communities, regardless of wealth. These trends, often the product of long-standing, discriminatory policies, cut across various environmental issues and cause notable harm in communities of color. For these reasons, the Sierra Club, as an environmental organization, must speak out when any opportunity to better assess the racial impacts of legislation arises.

In Maine, we can see this very injustice in action on the Penobscot River. The Juniper Ridge landfill and various other sources of pollution have been poisoning the ancestral waters of the Penobscot Nation for decades, and for members of the Nation, the continuing pollution has severely disrupted their access to clean water and traditional fishing grounds. While the Sierra Club, among other prominent environmental organizations in the state, is pursuing legislative solutions to the issue of the Juniper Ridge landfill this session, it provides a compelling example in light of L.D. 2.

Since this nation's founding, Indigenous peoples and other communities of color have been put on the frontlines of environmental battles and, ultimately, environmental damage. Situations like the one described above have been repeated throughout time

across this country, with the largest impacts falling on Black and Indigenous communities.

Maine has not been spared from our country's legacy of systemic racism. As a state that is 94% white, it is pertinent that Maine works to ensure that the needs of minority communities are prioritized, not overlooked. L.D. 2 offers a clear pathway to ensure that each legislative decision that this body makes accounts for them. It must be the responsibility of any good governing body to demonstrate compassion and act with urgency in response to the needs of its community's most marginalized. L.D. 2 is about informed policy making and transparency. Unfortunately, L.D. 2 does not prevent policies that reinforce racism in our state, and does not require the compassionate lawmaking that the Sierra Club advocates for. But it does require legislators to act in full awareness of the impacts of their decisions, and lays bare to the public the knowledge that decision-makers acted with when they voted. L.D. 2 serves as a starting point for normalizing dialogue about racial disparity in Maine, demonstrating good faith governance, and recognizing the impacts that policy decisions have on minority groups in our state.

The bill before this committee is a small step forward to addressing legacies of racial discrimination in this State and in our country. L.D. 2 would make Maine a model for race-conscious policy-making, and would build principles of justice and anti-racism into decision-making processes at the highest level.

For the above reasons, we, at the Sierra Club, urge you to vote ought-to-pass on L.D. 2.