



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Senate President Jackson, Speaker Talbot Ross, and members Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

From: David Gibson

Date: December 20, 2022

Re: Testimony neither for or against L.D. 3: **An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program**

My name is David Gibson. In addition to serving as a member of the Sierra Club Maine Executive Committee, I am the Director of Energy at College of the Atlantic and a resident of Morrill. My testimony is on behalf of myself, the Legislative Team of Sierra Club Maine, and our 22,000 members and supporters across the state.

Firstly, I would like to recognize the urgency of this moment. Many Mainers face a dual challenge of rising and unprecedented heating costs, as well as the end of Emergency Rental Assistance, just as winter is starting. This issue is literally a matter of life or death for some of our most vulnerable residents. I would like to emphasize a dire need for heating assistance and emergency housing assistance in any emergency relief package and express gratitude to the legislature for treating this matter with the seriousness it deserves.

However, I would also like to emphasize the need for addressing the systemic root of this dual crisis through investing in our clean energy future. I am a Certified Energy Manager and Building Performance Institute Building Analyst. I have transitioned more than a dozen buildings in Maine entirely off of fossil fuels, including my own home.

High energy costs are a complex and long-term problem. They are caused by inefficient buildings, widespread dependence on fossil fuels, and the price volatility of global markets and international events. While there is little our small state can do to impact international supply issues and global price fluctuation, opportunities still exist to safeguard against similar future crises. Heating costs have roughly doubled from two years ago; and there's no way to know with certainty what the cost of our reliance on fossil fuels will be two, five, or ten years from now.

To truly address the problem, we need to improve the efficiency of hundreds of thousands of homes across the state, and educate Mainers on opportunities to save money through energy efficient habits and adoption of clean heating technologies – focusing first on Mainers most at risk. Prioritizing low-income and working class residents won't just ensure greater resilience in times of crisis, it will save families and workers thousands of dollars in the long run.



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In this legislation or a future bill, I recommend the following steps to reduce the risk of future heating crises:

1. I would highly encourage you to allocate a portion of the funds (10%) towards creating a revolving-loan fund (in the Efficiency Maine Clean Energy Accelerator) to offer 0% interest loans for home efficiency improvements. This will help reduce long-term energy costs, preventing the current emergency from repeating year after year.
2. It would also be wise to invest a small portion of these funds to support a dedicated coordinator or two in the Governor's office and Efficiency Maine to help coordinate work between Maine's agencies. The person in this role would collaborate with our Federal delegation and the Biden Administration to help shape the rules for the allocation of funds from the multi-year allocations of the Inflation Reduction Act and to secure funds from that Act and other Federal sources for programs and projects in Maine and to improve the regional grid serving Maine. These efforts would help reduce long-term energy costs.
3. I would also encourage you to allocate a portion of funds annually to grow Maine's workforce and expand the pool of energy efficiency and electrification installers in the state. Thousands of Mainers need little persuasion to invest in efficiency upgrades, but the perennial challenge is finding trusted, skilled contractors to do the work. A stronger workforce would allow more Mainers to take advantage of existing incentives and, over time, reduce the total demand for heating fuels statewide. As the energy efficiency field continues to grow, investing in the workforce is increasingly a win-win for both Maine residents and our state's economy.

Thank you Governor Janet Mills, Senate President Troy Jackson, and Speaker Talbot Ross for bringing this legislation forward and acting swiftly to save lives this winter.