

Date: March 16, 2023

To: State & Local Government Committee

From: Cole Cochrane, Maine Youth Action

Re: Testimony against LD 894, An Act to Preserve Heating and Energy Choice by Prohibiting a Municipality from Prohibiting a Particular Energy System or Energy Distributor



Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and the esteemed members of the State & Local Government committee. My name is Cole Cochrane, I am from Saco, and I represent Maine Youth Action, a statewide youth advocacy group that represents hundreds of young Mainers from varying backgrounds. I am here today to testify in opposition to LD 894, An Act to Preserve Heating and Energy Choice by Prohibiting a Municipality from Prohibiting a Particular Energy System or Energy Distributor.

When I first heard about this legislation, there were a few positions that came to mind: first and foremost, I think it needs to be clear that this bill does not serve the public's interest and instead benefits the fossil fuel industry. Fossil fuel companies are facing immense pressure from fair competition by renewable sources of energy, such as solar and wind. Those alternative sources of energy are increasingly cost effective in comparison to fossil fuels. In fact, as of 2022, the costs of electricity from fossil fuels ranged between 5 and 17 cents per kilowatt hour; while on the other hand, solar energy only averaged between 3 and 6 cents. Furthermore, these companies face additional pressure from municipalities, for municipal governments are working towards the greater good by advancing initiatives to resolve the climate crisis. One of those critical initiatives may be banning particular energy systems or distributors. All in all, the fossil fuel industry is scared of losing their market share, and therefore are promoting bills such as LD 894 in order to deter fair competition within the energy market, but also simultaneously impair the municipal response to climate change.

My second position I hold is that Maine has a long standing tradition of local autonomy. It has been a home rule state since 1969. This has empowered municipalities to take action on important issues facing our communities. This obviously ranges widely, but I'd like to focus on the perspective of climate action. Municipal governments have taken strong stances on their climate responses and have committed to ambitious targets and plans. How are they able to meet these targets if the state starts imposing restrictions on their autonomy? It might be energy systems and distributors today, but I fear this will set a terrible precedent that would lead to a domino effect. Preserving local autonomy and rejecting bills like LD 894 is the best course of action in order to ensure that municipalities can continue their climate action work without unnecessary barriers and restrictions. I would also like to add that, as a youth advocate, starting to be involved in politics and current issues today begins at the local level. I have seen groups of enthusiastic advocates successfully fight for ordinances, plans and investments aimed towards promoting a sustainable community. This could not have been done without local autonomy, which is something that is on the line with this bill. Therefore, I hope the committee may take into consideration my positions and vote "ought not to pass" on LD 894. Thank you for your time and your service.