



SOLAR ENERGY ASSOCIATION OF MAINE

Testimony in Support of L.D. 1606

An Act to Finance Clean Energy and Infrastructure in Maine

Steven L. Weems, Board Member

Solar Energy Association of Maine

To the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology

April 27, 2023

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and other distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology: my name is Steve Weems, Board Member of the Solar Energy Association of Maine (SEAM); also founder and President of Dirigo Community Solar Group (Dirigo CSG), a nonprofit association of small, member-owned community solar farms. We think LD 1606 expresses an important priority, to have our public elementary and secondary schools set an example for their learners (students), and their extended communities, regarding energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. Some public schools already are leading by example in this area; it would be highly beneficial if others could join them. LD 1606 would facilitate this and for this reason we support LD 1606.

Public schools are under great financial pressure, for many reasons, including the rapid rise in special needs students, the influx of non-English speaking students in certain communities, the need to implement more stringent security measures, and schools having to provide more and more student support in areas traditionally handled at home within the families. The provisions of LD 1606 would provide important new funding in this context.

Acknowledging this, we think LD 1606 is too ambitious to be properly

funded in its current form, and invite the sponsor to bring forth an amendment with some of all of the following provisions included in it.

First, we suggest a pilot grant program be established in the accelerator to finance energy audits and feasibility studies for renewable energy or energy efficiency retrofit projects, limited to a defined number of school studies (10-25) during the period of the pilot program. We are aware of the myriad of worthy programs and initiatives being undertaken by the Efficiency Maine Trust (the “trust”). We are reluctant to “rob Peter to pay Paul,” so to speak, and do not think it would be appropriate to take the funding for this work from other projects, or to have electricity ratepayers fund this work. Therefore we think this best would be funded through the State’s General Fund, which would require a fiscal note, perhaps \$100,000 – 250,000 depending on the number of studies included in the pilot.

We reluctantly suggest the sponsor consider striking Section 2 requiring the trust to establish a pilot loan program. The types of improvements to be undertaken based on the results of the energy audits and renewable energy studies are likely to be capital intensive, requiring substantial new capital. While these might fit under the umbrella of the trust’s Maine Green Bank, we think the capital for the recommended projects, particularly for renewable energy projects, should come from private sources, as would be the case in the C-PACE (commercial property-assessed clean energy) program for similar projects in the commercial sector. There are other private sources already being utilized for clean energy projects located on school properties as well.

We think changes of this nature may be necessary to makes this laudatory bill financially digestible, although this is difficult to say based on the urgency and “here-and-now” scope of the need. It may be necessary to get started with a pilot while taking more time to evaluate larger, more sustainable funding sources.