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Maria Libby
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January 9, 2024

Senator Mark Lawrence, Chair
Representative Stanley Paige Zeigler, Chair
Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Chair Lawrence, Chair Zeigler, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology,

My name is Maria Libby, and I serve as the superintendent of two school districts - the Five Town Community School District, which serves students from Appleton, Camden, Hope, Lincolnville, and Rockport at the high school level, and MSAD 28 (aka Camden Rockport Schools) which serves Camden and Rockport students in grades Pre-K to 8. We are known as an innovative and cutting-edge school district, from our culture of open mindedness to our commitment to sustainability. In fact, we were very proud to include the UN Sustainability Goals as an overarching framework to decision-making in our most recent Strategic Plan.

For the Five Town School District and Camden-Rockport Schools solar generated electricity goes hand in hand with our overall sustainability efforts to lessen the schools' dependence on fossil fuels. In addition to our participation in community solar which covers 90% of our district's electricity needs, the Camden Hills Regional High School is powered by an onsite 100 kW wind turbine and 159 kW rooftop solar array. When we recently designed and constructed our new middle school, we figured out how to use the heat differential from the nearby sewage treatment plant to help heat that building. The range of clean energy projects that our district has engaged helps students not only learning about climate change, but also witness efforts to mitigate its impacts. As an educator, I believe it is critical to engage in such practices to showcase the deep care and concern we have regarding the impact of climate change on future generations. Investing in clean energy, onsite and via community solar, makes a clear statement to students every day they show up in our schools: we are invested in your future.

Our investment in clean energy has also made an impact on our budgets, too, and every penny saved is one we can either utilize to reduce taxpayer burden or to invest in other critical areas for students at a time when public education funding is challenging. The volatile price of natural gas has major impacts on facilities budgets for school districts across Maine, and allowing our districts independence to make their own energy choices and instead invest in local energy resources enables a cost reduction that ultimate impacts taxpayers. To state it clearly: our participation in community solar generates electricity that will help lower costs for taxpayers in our school districts. In fact, this year our solar credits have exceeded our energy consumption, and we have banked energy and saved significant money. We are significantly reducing our electricity costs in next year's budget as a result, directly saving taxpayer money.

I understand there are concerns about overall costs of Maine's Net Energy Billing program. For our district, we have seen positive impacts, from financial savings to environmental benefits. I look forward to learning more from the forthcoming cost/benefit analysis commissioned by the Maine Public Utilities Commission, as I believe it is critically important to analyze costs alongside the benefits clean energy provides. Evaluating the many benefits of clean energy will allow us to collectively determine what is best moving forward for all Mainers—including our students.

Thank you for considering the perspective of the many school districts across the state that participate in Maine's Net Energy Billing program. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Maria Libby
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