

To: Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology (EUT)

From: William Weber, MEng., retired
Portland Climate Action Team

Date: January 22, 2024

Subject: Public Hearing in Favor of LD 2077 - An Act Regarding Customer Costs and the Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas

Good morning, Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology (EUT).

My name is Bill Weber, and I am a resident of Portland, Maine. I am testifying in favor of LD 2077 because we desperately need meaningful action to address the devastating impacts of climate change. In Portland, where I work with the Portland Climate Action Team (PCAT), we have a comprehensive climate action plan entitled "One Climate Future." This plan was developed in consultation with thousands of community members over an 18 month period and vigorously endorsed by our City Council. The principal goal of the plan is to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by the year 2050. To accomplish this, WE MUST begin to phase out the use of natural gas. Natural gas contains methane (CH₄), a super pollutant with regards to greenhouse gas emissions and is more than 28 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere. It must be recognized that LD 2077 would not eliminate natural gas distribution but would start the long slow trend to eventually phasing out fossil fuels.

At the recently concluded UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, COP-28 President Sultan al-Jaber urged the delegates to get behind an agreement that would begin the transition to renewable energy. Al-Jaber, who is the Minister of Industry in the oil rich UAE, said ahead of the release of the draft agreement, "Let's please get this job done." He added, "I need you to step up, and I need you to come out of your comfort zones." He could have been talking to the EUT committee.

I am in favor of LD 2077, but I would request the sponsors of the bill consider not just curtailing expansion of gas lines in municipalities that are outside of the utilities service area, but also all new hookups in their service area. I believe those added sources within a service area will have a much greater effect in terms of GHG emissions. I would suggest adding the following statement, **"Counties or towns may adopt additional restrictions on local gas connections."**

I like analogies, do you? An analogy in this situation would be "when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging." But in this case a more appropriate scenario is we find ourselves in a hole and the hole is suddenly filling with water. Do we, as cognizant human beings, recognize the imminent danger and start to climb out of the hole or do we keep digging? I pose that question to the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please vote 'ought to pass' on LD 2077 with the suggested additions.

Sincerely,
William J. Weber, PE (retired)
Portland Climate Action Team
Portland, Maine

