

Comments on LD2077

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I am a retired earth scientist with a strong interest in energy issues, especially as how they relate to the emission of gases that are warming our planet. The recent winter storms in Maine are a harbinger of worse to come if we do not curtail drastically our burning of fossil fuels. It was recently revealed by world climate organizations that 2023 was the hottest year on the historical record and that the anomalous temperatures of the last half of 2023 are literally off the charts. Urgent policy action is necessary. I applaud the introduction of LD2077 to limit future expansion of natural gas service within Maine in order to curtail fossil-fuel burning. **I am in favor of LD2077 with the following comments.**

Sec. 1, 35-A MRSA §301, sub-§7 (new): This proposed legislation will require that all new main and distribution lines must be paid for by the potential customer(s) of that new infrastructure. This is a reasonable prescription. Not only are gas customers now paying high rates due to the wholesale costs of gas, but they would be unduly burdened by forcing them to pay for the expansion of the infrastructure. This prescription also has the effect of curtailing the expansion of the current infrastructure as potential customers will face perhaps large upfront costs to establish service and thus not choose to have gas connections.

Sec. 2. 35-A MRSA §2104, sub-§4 (amend): PUC may not, after 1/1/2025 approve any service outside existing utility's service area. I strongly support putting effective limits on all future gas service to existing service areas. This prevents the large-scale expansion of gas service within Maine. **But does this need to be strengthened by stating that PUC shall not increase existing service areas nor adjust existing service area boundaries?**

Sec. 6 (new): This prescribes a study of possibilities for geothermal heat districts. I support this part of the legislation because geothermal heating has been long overlooked as a potential heating resource in Maine.

Sec. 7 (new): This section asks PUC to study costs for customers in gas expansion scenarios, among other items. However, the intent of former parts of the legislation (Sec. 1 and 2) is to effectively limit new expansion in Maine; so **the question is whether this part (Sec. 7) of the proposed study is necessary.**

Sec. 8 (new): Much of this information in 1-4 under Sec. 8 is known already. The real challenge is dissemination of this information in the context of choosing what appliances new and retrofit construction managers should incorporate into their plans. The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention et al. may be able to cobble together various studies to satisfy this requirement. **Under “5. Recommendations”, the list of indoor fossil fuel appliances should include “cooktops”.**

I note that this bill does not force any existing gas users to give up any current appliances or disconnect from gas service entirely. This legislative stance seems appropriate and, on the other hand, the legislation would have considerable pushback if it did.