

**Testimony of
George Lapointe, Mayor, City of Hallowell
Before the Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technologies
27 February 2025**

In opposition to LD 32, An Act to Repeal the Laws Regarding Net Energy Billing, and LD 257, An Act to Eliminate the Practice of Net Energy Billing, LD 450, An Act to Lower Electricity Costs by Repealing the Laws Governing Net Energy Billing, and LD 515, An Act to Reverse Recent Changes Made to the Law Governing Net Energy Billing and Distributed Generation

I am George Lapointe, Mayor of the City of Hallowell, Maine. I am here today testifying on my own behalf and not for Hallowell City Council. I am also a homeowner who has solar panels on our home that have been generating power for five years. I am here to testify in opposition to LD 32, An Act to Repeal the Laws Regarding Net Energy Billing, LD 257, An Act to Eliminate the Practice of Net Energy Billing, LD 450, An Act to Lower Electricity Costs by Repealing the Laws Governing Net Energy Billing, and LD 515, An Act to Reverse Recent Changes Made to the Law Governing Net Energy Billing and Distributed Generation

Hallowell believes strongly that an aggressive approach is needed with respect to energy production and reducing fossil fuel emissions in the environment. Hallowell's Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the City Council in 2022, includes the following language that is relevant to today's hearing.

- A vision for Hallowell in 2030 includes "By investing in low-carbon initiatives and lifestyles, Hallowell will be *sustainable*".
- We affect the impact of global climate change through positive, sustainable changes at the local level, with a focus on sustainable energy resources such as solar projects

Hallowell has taken this issue seriously and had entered into a contract with Perennial Renewables to place a solar energy project on city owned land that will also house our Public Works Department. We are doing this because it is the right thing to do for the environment and it makes economic sense. If LD 32, LD 257, LD 450, or LD 515 were signed into law, Hallowell would stand to lose \$300,000, including 20-years of electricity savings (\$140,000 at \$7,000/year), and 20 years of lease payments (\$160,000 at \$8,000/year). Hallowell will lose this already permitted investment if any of these bills are signed into law.

My understanding is that net energy billing was implemented to accelerate Maine's clean energy transition, incentivizing the development of small and large-scale distributed solar energy projects allowing the owners of solar projects to offset their electric bills using credits generated when their solar array produces excess power. The excess power generated is fed onto the grid and serves neighboring households and businesses.

My understanding is also that net energy billing provides the following benefits:

- Cost savings to all ratepayers. In 2022 the Energy, Utilities and Technology committee tasked the MPUC with providing annual reports on the net energy billing program's cost and the benefits of distributed generation. Last year's report showed that, in 2023 alone, net energy billing provided nearly \$30 million more in benefits than costs.
- Strengthening the grid through upgrades paid for by the solar owner. Often, upgrades are required to interconnect solar installations with the distribution grid. These upgrades can deliver shared benefits to all ratepayers if they provide reliability benefits or accelerate upgrades that would have been required.
- Increasing equitable access by allowing individuals who cannot install their own systems to participate and benefit, promoting equitable access to renewable energy savings.
- Reducing peak demand and transmission costs by increasing local and distributed generation of renewable energy
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality through adoption of renewable energy. This supports Maine's and Hallowell's environmental goals.

Importantly, eliminating net energy billing will increase Maine's dependence on imported fossil fuels. The current and future uncertainty caused by tariffs, particularly with Canada, heightens the concern about imported energy sources. Given this uncertainty, it is clear to me that we need more, not fewer, ways to stabilize and strengthen Maine's energy mix from within our state.

As I mentioned earlier, we have rooftop solar on our home which has been in place for five years. Our home system has generated 35.2 megawatts of power over these five years, power that would have had to come from another source without our rooftop solar system. I understand that the sun does not shine all the time but with net energy billing, we buy extra power when needed and sell extra to the grid when we have excess. Seems pretty good to me as a consumer and Maine resident.

If net energy billing requires adjustment, my sense is that we need to improve the system rather than getting rid of net energy billing. My understanding is that net energy billing is good for so many parties: individuals, schools, libraries, municipalities, and businesses who invested in solar generation systems based on the promise of the Maine State Legislature that even if changes to the net energy billing program were made, their benefits would be guaranteed. Let's keep that promise and build on it. The elimination of net energy billing seems like a "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" approach to the energy future in Maine that, to my mind, doesn't make sense.

For these reasons, I oppose LD 32, LD 257, LD 450, and LD 515 because they are backward steps in Maine's desire and need to become more energy independent and less dependent on fossil fuels for electrical generation

Thank you for your service to the State of Maine. Please let me know if Committee members have any questions; I would be happy to address them.