BRANCH
RENEWABLE ENERGY

February 25, 2025

Hon. Senator Mark Lawrence, Senate Chair
Hon. Representative Melanie Sachs, House Chair
132nd Legislature Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
100 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333

RE: **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
LD 515: An Act to Reverse Recent Changes Made to the Law Governing Net Energy Billing and Distributed Generation
LD 359: An Act to Prohibit Net Energy Billing by Certain Customers

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Members of the Joint Standing Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee,

I am submitting testimony in opposition to five similarly themed bills: LD32, LD257, LD450, LD359, LD515 all of which would either make disruptive retroactive changes to existing Net Energy Billing (NEB) agreements or would repeal the NEB program all together. I am the owner of Branch Renewable Energy (Branch), and I work in the solar industry as a project developer and consultant—100% of my professional work is focused right here in Maine. My company is not funded by wall street—I'm a small business based in North Yarmouth, and I hire many Maine-based businesses including contractors, surveyors, wetland scientists, and engineers during the course of my work.

My local solar colleagues and I recognize that NEB does incur a cost to ratepayers, but the program was not conceived out of a snatch and grab scam intended to harm ratepayers and enrich solar project owners. All along we knew that the benefits would outweigh the costs, and we now finally have more accurate data from the PUC and the utilities showing that there are net benefits to net energy billing.[1]

Branch specifically develops and constructs community solar projects allowing residential customers to sign up at no cost and save 15% on their electric utility bill. Regardless of your socio-economic circumstance, political party, zip code, or amount of power that you consume—every Mainer can benefit from these community solar projects.

Let's look at an example. If the average household in Maine pays $141/month[2], and approximately $7 of that electric bill is attributed to NEB, then that same household could sign up for a community solar project and save 15% on their bill (no subscription fee required). Even though this household is charged ~$7/month for NEB, they can save ~$21/month through a community solar subscription, thus enjoying a net benefit of $14. Many community solar projects have open subscriptions available, so literally any Mainer is eligible to benefit from this program.

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[1] *Analysis of 2023 Net Benefits of Net Energy Billing Program*, Prepared for the Maine PUC by Sustainable Energy Advantage, April 1, 2024
[2] Based on average energy consumption of 550 kWh/month in CMP's utility territory

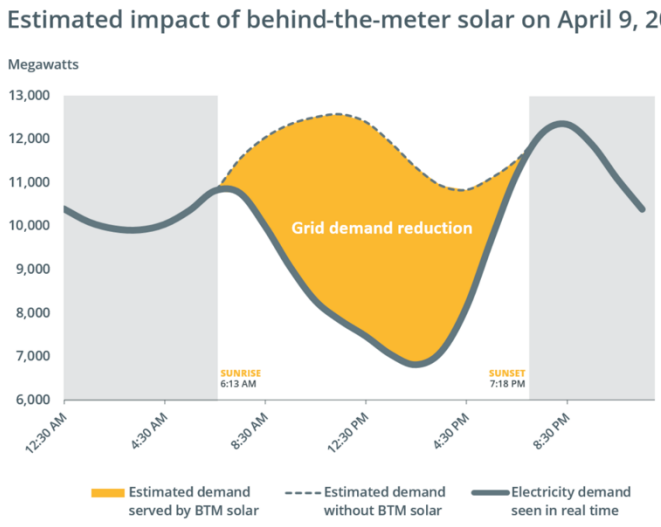
I hear the critics of NEB talk a lot about the costs while leaving out the benefit analysis from their narrative. The math in the prior paragraph is a simple representation of how these policies help Jane in New Gloucester, Diane in Lewiston, and Leland in Mars Hill. The impression that only rich people can benefit from solar is simply not true. All Mainers can benefit from community solar for $0 if they so choose.

I also see municipalities, schools, and even utilities benefiting from net energy billing. I am currently working with the Yarmouth Water District where they are hosting two community projects on land that they own, including a third solar project that they are building themselves to stabilize their operating costs to mitigate future rate hikes for their own water ratepayers. Maine-based Revision Energy is building the project alongside their Maine-based civil, fencing, and electrical subcontractors.

Solar is providing grid infrastructure upgrades such as three phase upgrades, new power poles, and new wires that are all in desperate need of repair. These grid enhancing upgrades are the responsibility of the solar project company—not the ratepayers. The grid is being improved throughout the state and New England region because of these solar projects.

ISO-New England (ISO-NE) is also observing positive trends for grid demand reduction due to behind the meter solar. While solar does not produce power at night, it's unique generation profile inserts power into the grid during the daytime when ISO-NE needs it the most. Smaller scale, in front of the meter 1 MW solar projects can also have a similar impact on demand reduction when the power is injected onto the distribution power lines.

The graph below using ISO-NE data shows what is known as a "duck curve" where solar greatly reduces the demand on the grid when solar power is producing the most[3]. Instead of the grid enduring a peak demand of 12,500 MW during the day, a sample data set from 4/9/23 shows that solar reduced demand down to 7,000 MW during the day. Demand reduction during the daytime hours minimizes the need to fire up expensive peaker plants such as the oil-fired power plant on Cousins Island. Regarding the criticism that solar does not produce power when we need it, this proves that solar does in fact meet a critical generation need during high demand, daytime events on our regional power grid.



[3] https://www.iso-ne.com/about/where-we-are-going/solar-power-impact

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Demand reduction days due to solar production are on the rise in ISO-NE territory. From 2018-2022, ISO-NE observed 34 days similar to the graph above where demand is lower during the day than at night. In 2022 alone, there were 45 days creating this positive effect, and in 2023 that number increased to 73 days (20% of the year). If we can continue to deploy these distributed generation assets utilizing the net energy billing policies in place, then solar will play an important role in stabilizing our regional power grid.

Lastly, these bills represent poor policymaking for a program and technology that is complex and nuanced. A full stop of net energy billing also sends a bad general business message about Maine and its regulatory landscape for *any* industry—if you bring investment to our state, we might change the rules on you. We want to attract businesses and families to Maine, and this type of policymaking does not build the credible and predictable market conditions that any business or industry would be looking for.

I am happy to meet in person with any of the members on this EUT committee to discuss this topic because I have full confidence that we all have a common goal to make Maine better and help its residents, businesses, schools, hospitals, and municipalities.

Thank you for taking time to review my testimony in opposition to these proposed legislative bills.

Respectfully,

Chris Byers, Owner
Branch Renewable Energy
cbyers@branchrenewables.com
207-653-9864