



Town of Jay

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February 27, 2025

Senator Mark Lawrence, Chair
Representative Melanie Sachs, Chair
Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony from the Town of Jay, Maine Opposing LD 32 and LD 257

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology:

My name is Shiloh LaFreniere, and I serve as the Town Manager for the Western Maine town of Jay. Our Select Board wishes to submit the following testimony in opposition to the net energy billing proposals in front of you today, LD 32 and 257.

It has come to our attention that multiple proposals have been submitted this session to retroactively change or entirely repeal our state's Net Energy Billing program, of which the town of Jay, alongside municipalities across the state, is a participant. While the conversation has focused a great deal on what these changes could do to solar developers, I would like to instead re-focus the conversation on what happens to a rural Maine municipality should Net Energy Billing be entirely wiped from our state's laws.

In 2023, our Select Board, along with several surrounding towns, voted to enter into a net energy billing agreement to purchase a share in a community solar farm to offset our municipal energy needs. As you likely know, the facilities in a small town make up a significant portion of our budget, and a focus of my role has been and will always be to reduce costs for taxpayers while maintaining the best municipal services possible. The opportunity to control some of our energy costs by transitioning to solar fits into this focus. We have been able to offset a portion of our electricity bills which were rising each year and instead invest in a source of energy that would lead to stable, reliable energy prices that we, as a municipality, could plan around. In the past 13 months this has equated to savings of approximately \$3,300 for our taxpayers. Combined with the saving that RSU 73, our local school district, is also saving, the impact is significant. The school district has saved close to \$330,000 since their solar credits began in December 2021.

Should this legislation pass, and there is no longer a Net Energy Billing program in the state, nor is the Public Utilities Commission permitted to allow a distribution utility to place bill credits on an oftaker's utility bill for the power they produce, we would go back to square one overnight. We would be required to purchase our energy yet again from the distribution utility, while left working with our attorneys as to how to renegotiate the 20-year agreement we have in place for solar power.

For this to happen without any warning, in the middle of an annual budget cycle, we would be forced to consider a spending freeze or seek taxpayer authorization of additional funds to cover these unanticipated costs and be able to continue managing our budgetary needs. This is not a simple hit to the solar industry, this is a complex unwinding of our state's energy policy that will leave many municipalities like Jay, as well as our school districts, special districts, and the tens of thousands of other program participants left to deal with the aftermath and take the financial hit. For the sake of municipalities across the state, please oppose these bills.

Thank you,

Shiloh A. LaFreniere

Town Manager
Jay, Maine