

February 26, 2025

Re: Testimony 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 359, and LD 450

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

My name is Jeremy Ray, and I have the privilege of serving as the Superintendent of Biddeford, Dayton, and Saco School Departments. Collectively, we serve over 5,000 students and employ more than 900 teachers, educational technicians, and ancillary staff. In addition to leadership in education and fostering the development of the next generation of Maine's leaders, I also am responsible for all school facilities, which includes 12 schools across our communities.

It should come as no surprise that rising energy costs present a significant and growing strain on our district's budget. The key drivers behind our budget this year include salaries and benefits, health insurance, payroll taxes, and yes—utilities. Our facilities are numerous, large, and all consume a great deal of energy.

The high cost of our energy burden, largely due to our region's reliance on the volatile price of fossil fuels, has served as a major challenge, limiting our options in terms of educational services and staffing. As fiscally responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, we leave no stone unturned in our search for cost savings. We have implemented a shared central office structure across all three districts—a model of government efficiency that reduces administrative overhead while maintaining quality service.

For that reason, we have also proactively worked to address energy costs by making wise investments in renewable energy, weatherization, and other initiatives to not only reduce our energy costs, but to save local taxpayers money, too. These efforts represent sound financial management rather than political statements—they're about balancing budgets while maintaining educational excellence.

Let's not forget that at the end of the day, a school district must go to our local community and seek approval of a budget, and the more we can do to drive costs down, the lower the impact on taxpayers. With diminishing federal and state funding—even as we serve a growing number of students with complex needs—our diligence in reducing costs is even more critical. Our energy

initiatives represent the kind of local control and fiscal responsibility that benefits everyone, regardless of political affiliation.

Recent severe weather events in our communities have further emphasized the importance of energy resilience and sustainability. These storms have demonstrated to our local residents that we must think strategically about utilizing renewable resources, not just for environmental reasons, but for practical and financial ones as well.

With that in mind, we began to transition to local, renewable energy sources in 2020, when we invested in community solar. This initiative was undertaken by our school districts and municipalities specifically to find the best financial deal for local taxpayers. We carefully researched and invested in these state-sponsored programs to ensure we were making responsible decisions with public funds.

With these plans in place, I speak/write in opposition of LD 32, LD 257, LD 359, and LD 450—which would essentially eliminate our past and future investments to reduce our district's energy costs. These bills would render moot the projects we've built, leaving us on the hook to pay for the infrastructure with no opportunity to receive fair compensation for the energy we produce. This would be financially devastating to our district, putting our investments at serious risk and potentially forcing us to absorb significant costs that would directly impact our educational programming and staffing. This action sadly could have a major impact on local taxpayers who have supported these forward-thinking initiatives.

We firmly believe that any public entity that has made these investments should be held harmless for doing the right thing and taking advantage of state-sponsored programs. Our school districts and local municipalities pursued these initiatives in good faith, with both fiscal responsibility and sustainability in mind. To change the rules after we've made these investments would undermine trust in government programs and penalize those who acted responsibly. This isn't about politics—it's about honoring commitments, protecting local investments, and maintaining the predictability that both businesses and public institutions need to operate effectively.

While we hear the interest in program reform, we speak today to remind the Committee and the legislature just who this legislation would harm. Superintendents and local school boards—regardless of political leanings—are doing everything they can to decrease costs that don't impact classroom instruction, and net energy billing is one of those ways. These decisions weren't made based on partisan considerations, but on practical financial analysis and local decision-making authority that both Democrats and Republicans support.

I am certainly not alone in leading school districts with significant investments in solar. There are dozens of districts across the state who have made the choice to utilize renewable energy not only to reduce our energy costs, but to showcase to students we care deeply about their future and to demonstrate responsible financial stewardship.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective, and I am happy to answer any questions. I urge you to reject LD 32, LD 257, LD 359, and LD 450 on behalf of Maine schools across the state.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Ray

Superintendent Biddeford, Dayton & Saco Schools