Testimony in Support of LD 601:
"An Act to Remove State-imposed Referendum Requirements Regarding Nuclear Power"

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 601, "An Act to Remove State-imposed Referendum Requirements Regarding Nuclear Power."

For decades, Maine's energy policy has been governed by outdated and unnecessary restrictions that effectively prevent the development of nuclear power in our state. The requirement for a statewide referendum before any nuclear project can even begin consideration has discouraged investment, weakened our energy independence, and placed Maine at a competitive disadvantage in adopting clean, reliable power sources. LD 601 is a necessary and commonsense reform that will modernize Maine's approach to energy, removing arbitrary political roadblocks and allowing experts, regulators, and industry leaders to evaluate nuclear power on its merits—just as we do with other energy sources.

A Competitive Disadvantage in Energy Policy

Maine's referendum requirement singles out nuclear energy in a way that no other energy infrastructure faces. Large-scale wind, solar, hydro, and natural gas projects are not subjected to a direct vote of the people before they can proceed. Instead, they undergo regulatory scrutiny from agencies staffed with experts who can weigh environmental, economic, and safety concerns in a structured and scientific manner.

By forcing nuclear projects to clear the additional hurdle of a statewide referendum—often influenced by fear, misinformation, and the political climate of the moment—Maine has effectively locked itself out of one of the most promising energy technologies of the 21st century. Today's reactors are safe, more efficient, and designed to mitigate risks through passive safety mechanisms.[1] The U.S. Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission have recognized nuclear energy as one of the

[1] https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/3-advanced-reactor-systems-watch-2030

safest and most reliable forms of electricity generation.[2] Maine must not allow itself to fall further behind.

Energy Affordability and Security

Maine's families and businesses continue to face some of the highest electricity costs in the country, exacerbated by our reliance on imported energy. More than 30% of Maine's energy supply comes from outside the state, exposing ratepayers to price swings and supply disruptions beyond our control, especially due to the current potential trade war on the horizon.[3]

For example, states such as Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York have taken legislative steps to ensure the continued operation and expansion of their nuclear fleets.[4] [5] Globally, nations like France and Canada have successfully leveraged nuclear energy to achieve low-carbon, reliable power generation.[6] Additionally, Maine's own 2025 state energy plan recommended instituting a nuclear-inclusive clean energy standard, highlighting the widespread agreement that clean energy policy should include nuclear.[7]

Nuclear energy offers a clear solution. It provides consistent, around-the-clock baseload power without the intermittency issues that plague wind and solar. Unlike fossil fuels, it is not subject to global commodity price fluctuations, meaning ratepayers benefit from stable, predictable costs over the long term. If Maine is serious about reducing energy costs and achieving true energy independence, we must remove unnecessary restrictions that prevent us from even considering nuclear energy as part of the solution.

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[2] https://www.energy.gov/ne/office-nuclear-energy#:~:text=Nuclear%20energy%20is%20one%20of,%2C%20environmental%2C%20and%20economic%20needs.&text=As%20an%20applied%20energy%20research,Enable%20a%20high-performing%20organization.

[3] https://themainemonitor.org/what-to-know-about-maines-electrical-utilities-ahead-of-election-day/

[4] https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=41534

[5] https://www.utilitydive.com/news/massachusetts-clean-energy-legislation-offshore-wind-grid-siting-ev/733192/#:~:text=The%20bill%20also%20overhauls%20the,fission%20and%20carbon%20capture%20technologies.

[6] https://www.canada.ca/en/natural-resources-canada/news/2023/11/joint-statement-in-the-field-of-civil-nuclear-energy-between-the-government-of-canada-and-the-government-of-the-french-republic.html

[7] https://www.maine.gov/energy/sites/maine.gov.energy/files/2025-01/Maine%20Energy%20Plan%20January%202025.pdf

A Pro-Jobs, Pro-Growth Policy

Beyond the benefits of lower energy costs, nuclear power represents a significant economic opportunity for Maine. A nuclear facility's construction, operation, and maintenance would create thousands of skilled, long-term jobs, strengthening our workforce and driving economic growth in rural communities.

The opposition to nuclear energy in Maine is rooted in outdated fears and misconceptions. Modern nuclear technology is vastly different from the systems of decades past. Innovations such as small modular reactors (SMRs) and advanced reactor designs have dramatically improved safety, efficiency, and waste management.[8] [9] Nations worldwide are embracing next-generation nuclear power as a critical part of their clean energy strategies, with 31 countries currently possessing 417 nuclear reactors and another 62 nuclear power reactors under construction.[10] Maine must recognize this reality and position itself as a leader in atomic energy's future.

A Step Toward a Cleaner Future

Maine has established ambitious carbon reduction goals, but current policies rely too heavily on intermittent renewables and imported hydropower. Wind and solar's intermittent nature requires backup power, often from natural gas, which defeats the purpose of a fully carbon-free grid.[11] Nuclear power is the only scalable, carbon-free energy source that can provide continuous, reliable power without requiring fossil fuel backups or excessive land use.

Conclusion

LD 601 does not mandate the construction of a nuclear plant in Maine. It simply removes a discriminatory and unnecessary barrier that prevents nuclear projects from being considered on their merits. Maine's energy future should be determined by science, economics, and regulatory expertise—not by political referenda that unfairly single out one technology over others.

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[8] https://www.ans.org/news/2025-01-23/article-6701/ibulletini-article-argues-for-more-certainty-in-advanced-reactor-waste-management/

[9] https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/what-are-small-modular-reactors-smrs

[10] https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/atomic-energy#:~:text=As%20of%202024%2C%2031%20countries%20worldwide%20are,62%20nuclear%20power%20reactors%20are%20under%20construction.

[11] https://mainepolicy.org/research/the-staggering-costs-of-new-englands-green-energy-policies/

Maine has an opportunity to embrace a diverse, stable, and forward-thinking energy policy that benefits consumers, strengthens our economy, and meets our environmental goals. Passing LD 601 is an essential step in that direction. We urge this committee to support LD 601 and remove these unnecessary barriers to Maine's energy future. Thank you for your time and consideration.