

Testimony of Ashley Luszczki
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
In Opposition to L.D. 830, An Act to Protect Maine's Scenic Beauty by Requiring Solar
Panel Fields to Be Hidden from View
March 17, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Ashley Luszczki. I am here on behalf of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, which represents a network of over 5,000 businesses located across the state. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to L.D. 830, An Act to Protect Maine's Scenic Beauty by Requiring Solar Panel Fields to Be Hidden from view.

Maine's natural beauty is one of its greatest assets – drawing tourists, new residents, and businesses alike. While the intent behind this legislation to preserve Maine's scenic beauty is well-intended, the Chamber is concerned that the proposed law is overly prescriptive. Specifically, while barriers may be appropriate in some cases, we would recommend that there be discretion at the state and municipal level to impose these conditions. We are also mindful that overly prescriptive laws, particularly at the state level, could inadvertently harm Maine's economy and hinder our clean energy transition.

For Maine to remain competitive and continue to attract investment, the state must ensure that its regulatory environment fosters growth and innovation. The proposed legislation mandates visual barriers around solar energy developments, requiring developers to invest in fencing, trees, shrubs, or other vegetation to screen their projects. These additional requirements would significantly increase the direct costs of these projects and the time it takes to bring them online. These increased costs and delays could discourage new investments in Maine's clean energy transition.

Additionally, solar energy projects do far more than provide clean power - they create immediate and long-term economic benefits for our communities. Solar developments generate jobs in engineering, construction, and maintenance, providing a boost to Maine's workforce. The construction phase alone supports local lodging, hospitality, and retail businesses, contributing to Maine's economy on multiple fronts. In the long run, solar projects also create sustainable, well-paying jobs for operations staff.

More broadly, clean energy development is helping to expand Maine's workforce in a growing and vital sector. According to the *Maine Clean Energy Industry Report* by the Governor's Energy Office (2024), Maine's clean energy sector is outpacing other New England states in terms of job growth. The state's business community, apprenticeship programs, and educational institutions are providing Mainers with the necessary training and skills to thrive in the renewable energy field. However, by imposing additional regulations on solar projects, this legislation may undermine the growth of job opportunities in the clean energy sector-specifically solar.

The Chamber believes that decisions regarding visual barriers are best made at the local level where communities are best positioned to understand and address their unique needs and concerns and for the projects that are subject to review at the municipal level that the DEP currently has the authority to impose conditions on the permit. This approach is not only practical but is used by other states, recognizing the importance of local and specific site characterization and ultimately balance between preserving beauty and fostering economic development.

In closing, while the Chamber recognizes and supports the importance of preserving Maine's natural beauty, we believe that this proposed legislation could have negative consequences for Maine's economy, job growth, and future in renewable energy. Therefore, we urge you to vote ought not to pass on L.D. 830. Thank you for your consideration.