



Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter

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Testimony against LD 556 by Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH (Hallowell)

Sen. Baldacci, Rep. Salisbury – and members of the State and Local Government Committee:

I represent PSR Maine, an organization of hundreds of health care professionals who share a concern about the biggest threats to public health. Our focus over recent decades expanded from prevention of nuclear war to include reduction of risks related to climate change and toxin exposures. There is a health component to all three of these issues. Climate change and its secondary effects have altered infectious disease patterns, affected air quality, led to increased incidence of heat illness, and led to both physical and emotional trauma to families experiencing extreme events.

I have practiced medicine in Central Maine since the early 1980's. In my patient population (pediatrician) climate change has additional associations with adverse pregnancy outcomes -- and with increases in allergies, respiratory impairment, and neurodevelopmental delays. (NEJM 386:24 2022)

Thus, it's imperative that we move as rapidly as practical away from our dependence on fossil fuel. In our current political situation, where climate action at the Federal level has been undermined, it's up to citizens to act at the state and local levels to promote this transition. 35% of greenhouse gas production comes from buildings – predominantly from heating units -- and electrification can make a big dent in this contribution. Any of you who have already installed heat pumps appreciate their efficiency.

Democracy works very well at the local level in Maine -- decisions made by officers of municipal governments must reflect the consensus of their constituents or they are booted out of office. This bill proposes to restrict the right of local municipalities to make local decisions, using the language of free choice. Fossil fuel interests are using the same language as we heard from Big Tobacco when localities initiated bans on indoor smoking in public buildings. Shouldn't towns in Maine retain the ability to set their own standards for energy efficiency?

In summary, confronting climate change is a generational challenge that will require transition away carbon dependence in buildings, transportation and industry. This bill is an attempt to inhibit one component of that transition. PSR Maine urges a NO vote on LD 556.

Sincerely,

Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH

Hallowell, ME