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Testimony of Representative Sophie Warren in Support of
L.D. 1037, An Act to Lower the Energy Burden of Residents by
Advancing Climate Change Goals
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Good morning Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and respected colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Sophie Warren, and I represent House district 124. Thank you for the opportunity to present L.D. 1037, **An Act to Lower the Energy Burden of Residents by Advancing Climate Change Goals**.

This bill will specifically name energy burden – a cross-section of energy need and the capacity of that resident to pay – as a part of future Reports of the Maine Climate Council. There are many ways to evaluate and address energy burden, but the Office of Public Advocate has published reports summarizing the term that offers a lot of utility for this conversation – as a technical way of describing the percentage of household income spent on energy costs.¹

This bill is rooted in the critical notion that transitions we make as a state to address climate change must work in line with equity policies that prioritize economic justice and day-to-day services so many Mainers rely on. Energy is a powerful focus for our climate change goals, but a Just Transition demands we work as collaboratively as possible as a state to protect and serve all Maine people and leave no one behind. The problems at the intersection of poverty and energy need are nothing new to so many advocates and department officials who I know have been researching and developing methods to bridge these very challenges for many years.

In fact, this bill is a reflection of GOPIF and the Climate Council's Equity Subcommittee Final Recommendations, published in March 2023,² specifically in recommendations in Sections 1, 3 and 4 addressing energy burden, as well as the Office of Public Advocate's Ratepayer Advisory Council recommendations released in December 2022.³

The language of this bill was first brought forward last session in LD 1437, *An Act to Address Poverty by Increasing Access to Energy Efficiency and Weatherization Programs* which

¹ P. 11, "Electric Ratepayer Advisory Council Third Annual Report," December 1, 2024, Office of Public Advocate, https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/Electric%20Ratepayer%20Advisory%20Council%20Report%20December%201%2C%202024_0.pdf.

² P. 89, "Climate Council Equity Subcommittee Final Recommendations," Maine Climate Council, https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/inline-files/Maine%20Climate%20Council_Equity%20Subcommittee%20Final%20Report_March%202023.pdf.

³ P. 24, "Electric Ratepayer Advisory Council Second Annual Report," December 1, 2024, Office of Public Advocate, https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/2022-12-01_OPA%20ERAC%20Report_0.pdf.

was heard as part of a larger bill in front of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. I was able to receive input from entities like GOPIF, Office of Public Advocate, Efficiency Maine Trust, and Maine Housing, among others. The bill did not move forward at that time.

In this Legislature, I am bringing forward a narrower bill to this session, because of what has changed from that time to this one. I am excited to have seen the work of the Maine Climate Council's November 2024 Report name and prioritize energy burden in its' goals and strategy for this next state climate plan. What may have been a premature proposal I cite to the important recommendations of the Equity Subcommittee in April of 2023 seems a reflection of the Maine Climate Council's work in March 2025. As I outline this great work below, I hope you will also see this bill as a timely and equitable inclusion to the great work of the Maine Climate Council.

This bill is reflected in Strategy C: Transition to Clean Energy, number one, "Decrease energy burdens while transitioning to clean energy,"⁴ with specific references to measuring and addressing energy burdens:

"Comprehensively analyze household energy burden in Maine in 2025, including all energy sources, and set a target for reducing the energy burden for low-income residents by January 2026."

The specific outline of the work actively being established in this most recent Report is as-follows:

"A comprehensive energy burden analysis in Maine should include a full range of energy costs to help provide a more complete picture of Mainers' energy spending. This will provide insights into the relative energy burdens of households that use electric appliances, vehicles, and heating compared to those that rely more on fossil fuels. It will also help ensure that Maine can target programs to help low- and moderate-income people reduce their reliance on the most expensive and price-volatile energy sources. This analysis, updated regularly, should be used to set a target⁵ and measure progress toward the goal of reducing the energy burden for low-income households."⁶

You might ask, if they are now including this goal, doesn't this nullify the purpose of this bill? I would answer no. I want to credit the most recent report of the Maine Climate Council and The Mitchel Center who make the very point within their most recent Report (November 2024), connecting this perspective addressing the link between energy burden and climate, and the value of structural inclusion of this kind of thinking:

"The Council stepped up its efforts to hear from communities and populations who often don't have time to participate in or struggle to access public processes, and whose voices are often left out. This can be due to geography, income, age, race, cultural or language barriers, disability, or other factors. These same populations are often most impacted by

⁴ P. 79, "Maine Won't Wait," November 2024, https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/2024-11/MWW_2024_Book_112124.pdf.

⁵ P. 171-173, "Maine Won't Wait," November 2024, https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/2024-11/MWW_2024_Book_112124.pdf.

⁶ P. 171-173, "Maine Won't Wait," November 2024, https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/2024-11/MWW_2024_Book_112124.pdf.

the challenges related to climate change, from storm-driven power outages to high household energy burdens.”

[...]

“A consistent thread emerged that the challenges of poverty, and its impacts on households and families, made engaging with state programs and opportunities challenging.”

[...]

“The Mitchell Center recommends increasing and formalizing engagement with community-based organizations and specific populations to ensure an ongoing role in program implementation and design. This will also assist the state and its partners to ensure more Mainers can engage in climate action and benefit from the solutions.”⁷

My hope is that this bill is putting into statute the realities of ongoing priority of poverty in the fight against climate change. As a small, rural state with higher-than-average rates of poverty and some of the highest comparative, I both believe it is a moral imperative we fight poverty alongside climate change but also that to do so is economical in the long run in the decisions we make and the outcomes we will see.

Thank you for your time and consideration of how we can continue and further our efforts to address our long-standing equity issues as we fight climate change. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.

⁷ P. 154, “Maine Won’t Wait,” November 2024, https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/2024-11/MWW_2024_Book_112124.pdf.