



# Maine Conservation Voters

*Inform. Vote. Protect.*

## **Testimony Neither for Nor Against on LD1317, An Act to Promote Responsible, Cost-effective Energy in Maine by Amending the Tariff Rates Applicable to the Commercial and Institutional Net Energy Billing Program**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Lucy Hochschartner, and I am the Climate and Clean Energy Director with Maine Conservation Voters (MCV). MCV represents over 14,000 members and supporters who are building a just, thriving future for all by acting on the climate crisis, protecting the environment, and safeguarding our democracy. I am here today to testify neither for nor against on LD1317, An Act to Promote Responsible, Cost-effective Energy in Maine by Amending the Tariff Rates Applicable to the Commercial and Institutional Net Energy Billing Program.

**We are in a climate crisis.** In 2024, global emissions hit yet another new peak.<sup>1</sup> Transitioning away from fossil fuels is an absolute necessity to ensure families in Maine have a livable future. There is no time to waste, and with unprecedented attacks on clean, affordable electricity across the country, Maine must ensure that we keep pushing forward, rather than getting dragged backward. Communities on our coasts and in the mountains, up north and in the south, all need a transition to clean energy to prevent further damage from new realities like climate disasters, shifted growing seasons, and the loss of winter tourism.

**I also understand we are in an affordability crisis.** I take that very seriously and have frequently come up to testify in support of programs for low-income customers and programs. I know that per S&P Global Commodity Insights data, household electricity prices in Maine rose 65.5% between 2018 and 2023. That was almost three times the rate of inflation and more than any other state in the country.<sup>2</sup> I know that the recent ERAC report on energy burden estimates that low-income households in Maine have an average electricity burden of 8% — more than twice what is considered affordable, though that may not fully capture assistance that these

---

1

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-global-co2-emissions-will-reach-new-high-in-2024-despite-slower-growth/>

2

<https://www.spglobal.com/market-intelligence/en/news-insights/articles/2024/8/rising-us-power-prices-reflect-new-reality-for-utilities-in-warming-world-82591284>

households are receiving.<sup>3</sup> Just this week, I was in Scarborough hosting an event to help people understand their utility bills, and we went through . Electricity is a basic need, and MCV is working diligently on both near-term and long-term solutions to move toward universal access.

**I also know that while it is not the entire solution, clean electricity is a critical part of *any* affordability solution.** Fossil fuels are costing us. In 2021, Maine spent more than \$4.7 billion on imported fossil fuels. To keep that money in customers' pockets and in our own local economies, we need to electrify and transition to clean forms of electricity generation. Furthermore, these fossil fuels are also worsening storms that are having an increasingly large effect on our electricity costs. Net energy billing has been a critical policy tool to help us bring clean and Maine-made solar generation online. Like any resource, that has cost money. However, it has also brought incredible *benefits* to ratepayers and our society. In 2023, for every dollar invested in the grid through this program, there were \$1.29 in benefits.<sup>4</sup> These benefits ranged from reducing transmission and distribution needs to suppressing prices by shaving peak demand. We need to ensure that moving forward, the state continues to invest in solar.

**I appreciate the attempt at compromise that this legislation puts forward; however, we have real concerns about whether this is going to have the intended effects.** Any solution must ensure that solar projects and businesses stay whole. Solar is a critical part of our energy system, and these businesses a critical part of our economy. Customers and businesses alike made decisions in good faith off of the program as originally designed, and any compromise has to take their needs, as well as the needs of our climate, into account. There may be further work needed to truly get there.

Sincerely,  
Lucy Hochschartner

---

3

[https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/VEIC\\_Maine%20Energy%20Burden%20and%20Affordability%202024\\_2.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/VEIC_Maine%20Energy%20Burden%20and%20Affordability%202024_2.pdf)

4

<https://www.maine.gov/mpuc/sites/maine.gov.mpuc/files/inline-files/Solar%20-Y2023%20-CBA%20-%20LD%20327.pdf>