



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
From: Andrew Blunt, Sierra Club Maine
Date: April 23, 2025
Re: **Testimony in Support of L.D. 1619:** *Resolve, to Establish a Commission to Study Pathways for Creating a Thermal Energy Networks Program in Maine*

Dear Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology,

I write on behalf of the Sierra Club Maine Chapter, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nationwide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. To that end, we urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on L.D. 1619.

Thermal energy networks (TENs) are an emerging renewable energy technology that provide highly efficient clean heating and cooling to entire neighborhoods. TENs are essentially a localized geothermal heating and cooling system often using existing natural gas distribution infrastructure, as seen in the image below.

The benefits of TENs are broad and diverse.

- **Greater efficiency, lower bills:** Ground source heat pumps are four times more efficient than combustion systems. Residents in an ongoing TENs pilot in Framingham, Massachusetts are expected to see their annual bills drop by 20%.
- **Safe, reliable energy:** Thermal energy networks rely on water to efficiently deliver heating and cooling, eliminating the risk of explosions that we see with natural gas.
- **Workforce of the future:** TENs rely on many of the same engineering principles and practices that exist in maintaining gas networks. Maine's gas utility workers can use their existing skills to install these networks, creating an easy pathway for clean energy union careers while maintaining the safety and integrity of existing gas infrastructure.
- **Clean air, healthy communities:** Ground-source heat pumps do not emit health-harming pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NOx) and benzene like burning fossil fuels does. As a

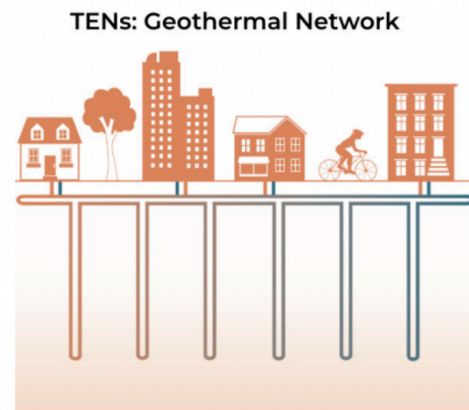


Image Credit: HEET

result, thermal energy networks can protect Maine's people and communities from fossil fuel pollution.

L.D. 1619 is the first step in building support for thermal energy networks in Maine. The bill would establish a committee of 13 members, representing local and state governments, labor, and environmental organizations, to assess the best path forward for building thermal energy networks in Maine.

Thermal energy networks, and the benefits laid out above, speak simultaneously to many of the energy challenges that this committee has sought to tackle this session. Rarely do we have an opportunity to convert existing fossil fuel infrastructure into renewable energy infrastructure while preserving jobs, lowering bills, and making communities healthier. TENS offers just that, and studying this technology and opportunities for its deployment in Maine is an excellent first step forward.

For the above reasons, we urge an 'Ought to Pass' vote on L.D. 1619.

Sincerely,

Andrew Blunt
Sierra Club Maine Chapter
Legislative and Political Strategist