Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony in Support of LD 1619, Resolve, to Establish a Commission to Study Pathways for Creating a Thermal Energy Networks Program in Maine

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 in support of LD 1619, Resolve, to Establish a Commission to Study Pathways for Creating a Thermal Energy Networks Program in Maine.

Maine households face very high home heating costs. Our state is more dependent on heating oil than any other state in the country, which leaves us vulnerable to volatile and expensive global markets.[1] Across all customers, the average home energy burden, or the cost to both heat and power one's home, is 6%, but that hides an even larger burden of 14% for low-income customers.[2] Propane is the most expensive form of heating for Maine families[3], which is why one of our major challenges as a state is to lean into new technologies that will help people to switch away from unregulated fuels in order to save money. Right now, we primarily rely on heat pumps to do this.

Maine has been a pioneer in heat pump adoption. State leaders, Efficiency Maine Trust, and everyday citizens have worked together to make this technology a resounding success. It has also helped that people are seeing serious savings, up to 60%, by switching to heat pumps.[4] But

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1 https://www.maine.gov/governor/mills/news/governor-mills-announces-maines-largest-yearly-drop-heating-oil-reliance-least-2010-2024-10-04#:~:text=Maine%20has%20been%20and%20remains,more%20funding%20in%20the%20pipeline.

2 https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/ERAC%20Report%20with%20Consultants%20Reports%20Embedded.pdf

3 https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/ERAC%20Report%20with%20Consultants%20Reports%20Embedded.pdf

4 https://www.bangordailynews.com/2025/03/11/mainefocus/mainefocus-environment/heat-pumps-save-mainers-up-to-60-percent-on-energy-bills-study-finds/#:~:text=A%20typical%20heat%20pump%20runs,to%20companies%20that%20install%20them.

there remains more work to be done. Even with surging heat pump adoption, buildings are still our second largest source of emissions.[5]

Maine has the opportunity to innovate even further by studying thermal energy networks. Thermal energy networks heat and cool piped water to multiple buildings. By connecting buildings into a closed-system like this, thermal energy networks are, on average, 3 to 6 times more efficient than other electric heating solutions.[6] As we electrify, that will also reduce the need for increased build out of transmission and distribution infrastructure to manage increased load.[7] This is critical for both our environment and our pocketbooks. It is for these reasons that, as of 2024, 13 states had taken steps to pioneer thermal energy networks.[8] Even still, there is more to learn about how the state might best leverage this new technology. This resolve is a common sense step forward to investigate costs and benefits, potential program design, and implementation.

This study could not be timelier. In order to protect communities from the worst impacts of the climate crisis, we must decarbonize. It is the challenge of our time, and it is not an easy one. Gaining more knowledge about innovative solutions that may be able to help us reduce emissions, create good union jobs, and lower costs is the only logical path forward.

Sincerely,
Lucy Hochschartner

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5 https://www.maine.gov/dep/news/news.html?id=12801571&utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=We%20read%20Maine%20s%20latest%20emissions%20inventory%20so%20you%20don%20t%20have%20to&utm_campaign=Climate%20Monitor%20June%2014%202024

6 https://www.utilitydive.com/news/thermal-energy-networks-us-cities-neighborhood-decarbonization/733225/#:~:text=A%20variety%20of%20potential%20heat,network%20proposal%20in%20Carbondale%2C%20Colorado.

7 https://buildingdecarb.org/why-efficiency-matters

8 https://www.utilitydive.com/news/thermal-energy-networks-us-cities-neighborhood-decarbonization/733225/#:~:text=A%20variety%20of%20potential%20heat,network%20proposal%20in%20Carbondale%2C%20Colorado.