

My name is Rev. Jill Saxby. I am a resident of Cape Elizabeth and serve on the Public Policy Committee of the Maine Council of Churches. The MCC supports LD 1949 and urges you to vote Ought to Pass on this important legislation.

The MCC's seven member denominations include the Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian-USA, Religious Society of Friends (Quaker), United Methodist, United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist denominations in Maine. The Council has been a member of the Environmental Priorities Coalition for over twenty years.

We believe our society has a moral duty to support the needs and dignity of the most vulnerable, to reduce disparities between rich and poor. We believe we have a collective responsibility for the environment entrusted to us, including ending the unsustainable extraction of non-renewable fossil fuels.

Fairness is a basic moral value. We believe LD 1949 helps to bring Maine's electricity economy more in line with this fundamental moral duty. Mainers of all income levels deserve a fair energy system that works for consumers, especially the most vulnerable electricity consumers, including older Mainers, people with medical conditions and families with infants. While high energy costs affect all Mainers, the high cost of natural gas prices, the effects of climate change, the non-transparency of utilities' disconnection practices, all conspire to disproportionately burden the most vulnerable among us. Low-income Mainers spend 8% of their income on electricity, more than twice what is considered affordable.

Fairness requires rules that address inherent power imbalances, especially in the case of basic human needs. LD 1949 expands protection from harmful utility disconnection, predatory advertising and overhead-charging practices.

Fairness thrives with transparency. LD 1949 would address the lack of transparency in the relationship between the rate-payer and utilities in several ways. It would improve public reporting requirements so that the public and legislature can create better energy policies in the future. It would make the actual costs of the current system more clear to all of us and hold utilities to higher standards that align with best practices in other states.

Fairness requires attention to those with no voice in the decision-making process -- in Biblical terms, the "least of these" (Mt. 25) and "the earth (that is) the Lord's and all that is in it." (Psalm 24). In this case, it means paying attention to the wider impact of our choices on the environment that sustains all life. Establishing environmental justice definitions at the PUC would not only help ensure fairer energy regulations, but would particularly help keep the needs of the most vulnerable of our neighbors at the center of concern as we work to meet our Climate Action Plan goals. By making clean energy more affordable for all, we can make the necessary transition away from volatile and costly fossil fuels markets, such as natural gas, the top driver of high electricity costs in Maine, an attainable goal. It has been estimated that moving Maine to 100% clean energy would result in average savings for Maine households of \$1300 a year in electricity and fuel costs.

But we know that we need to save more than money. We need to save the environment that sustains all life. To meet the challenge of climate change and its devastating impact on human and all other life, we must transition away from an unsustainable fossil-fuel based economy in the coming years.

We believe that LD 1949 can help make Maine's electricity market more fair, more sustainable and more responsible toward both the most vulnerable among us and the environment and resources entrusted to our care. Therefore, we urge you to vote Ought to Pass.

Thank you for considering our views.

Jill Saxby  
Maine Council of Churches  
LD 1949

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