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Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

RE: LD 1966—An Act to Improve Access to Community Solar Programs in the State

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Karen Blakelock, and I work as the climate and energy policy advisor for the Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to submit comments **in support of LD 1966**.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that both nature and people can thrive. We work in more than 70 countries, and use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners.

As an organization committed to creating a future of healthy lands, waters, and communities, TNC understands the need to rapidly transition to a future powered by renewable energy. Our organization is dedicated to ensuring that our work incorporates climate, conservation, and community—what we like to call, “the three Cs”.

LD 1966 aims to address two of those three Cs: climate and community. TNC supports this bill as it removes a hurdle for Mainers to enroll in community solar. The existing process, which requires dual billing, is confusing for consumers and complicates an already opaque system.

Additionally, there have been numerous reports over the last few months about the decreasing costs of solar—that it is winning out over other sources of energy generation when it comes to cost effectiveness.¹ We should be doing everything we can to make this source of energy more accessible to low-income Mainers, as the benefits are clear. Lower costs, healthier communities, and climate solutions are reason enough to support expanding solar access in Maine.

The website for the Maine Office of the Public Advocate explains how community solar works in Maine. It reads, “you will receive a second bill from the solar company for the credits generated for you that month, usually 45-60 days after that month’s electricity bill. You may see a higher bill from your solar company in the summer when more electricity is being generated...”² Many Mainers cannot afford a “second bill” that is likely higher in the summer than it would be otherwise.

¹ Canary Media, “Solar is driving renewable energy to new heights around the globe” October 24, 2025, https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/clean-energy/renewables-boom-global-solar-installations?utm_campaign=canary&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8ftBPa6FkpGSL5Ajq6nH2EOMzfVpcN9di2LROQVVjOa5sGlosiCZoPGC2klnBUKx-oNND6TDrHlj_d1TAYFHBXwm_31g&_hsmi=386714765&utm_source=newsletter

² Maine Office of the Public Advocate, Renewable Energy, Community Solar, https://www.maine.gov/meopa/electricity/renewable-energy/community_solar

Regardless of the actual savings that result from participating in community solar, this barrier of entry is too high and overly complicated.

Polling that TNC conducted this past February revealed that more than two thirds of Maine voters are supportive of solar, but 81% of respondents identified the cost of living as either an extremely serious or very serious problem while 71% said the same about the cost of electricity. This indicates that while most Mainers are supportive of solar, costs remain top of mind when considering all household choices.³

TNC asks that you support this bill as it is an important step towards increasing participation in a program that can both save Maine households money and benefit the natural environment. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in **support of LD 1966**, I am happy to answer any questions that arise.

³ New Bridge Strategy and FM3 Research conducted a survey among N=515 registered voters in Maine from February 21-25, 2025. Interviews were conducted via live telephone interviews (both cell phones and landlines) and online. Quotas were set for key demographic sub-groups, such as gender and age. The margin of error is +4.32% for the overall sample. The margin of error will vary for sub-groups.