

Testimony in Support of Sponsor Amendment to LD 1666, Regarding Consumer-owned Project  
Participation in Net Energy Billing  
Tyler Adkins, CEO, Maine Community Power Cooperative

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Good afternoon, Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and members of the committee. My name is Tyler Adkins. I serve as CEO of the Maine Community Power Cooperative, and speak today in favor of the proposed amendment to LD 1966 regarding consumer-owned project participation in net energy billing.

Maine Community Power is a consumer-owned cooperative that lowers Mainers' electricity bills by developing, owning, and operating small scale community solar projects. As a cooperative, we operate at cost and pass all benefits through to our members.

To the best of our knowledge, there is no other cooperative like this in the state.

We are primarily focused on serving low-income households and our membership of 185 has grown by more than 50% in the last 60 days. We are not surprised that those who are most impacted by rising prices are seeking opportunities to lower and stabilize their household costs. We expect this trend to continue and require this committee to take action to ensure we remain able to meet their needs.

Our nearly 200 members and 10 employees are constituents of 9 of the 13 members of this committee.

Earlier this year, the legislature made significant changes to net energy billing in the passage of LD 1777. We do not seek to relitigate those changes, however there is a simple legislative fix that is essential for our work, which we believe meets the intent of this committee.

This committee rightfully articulated that there is a meaningful difference between projects that are consumer-owned and those that are not. This is articulated in the structure of the kWh project charge, which exempts consumer-owned projects.

The committee also rightfully retained NEB for on-site projects, while requiring front of meter projects to receive utility approvals by the end of this year. This leaves a gap requiring a legislative fix, for projects that are the same size as typical on-site projects, and are consumer-owned, but front of meter.

In our case, these are sometimes 150kW ground mount projects located on 1 acre, providing resilience to the outskirts of the grid. In other cases, we work with a building owner to utilize all available space on their rooftop, maximizing production and managing the use of those credits, whether they're on-site or off-site.

We believe these are the types of projects this committee intended to preserve in the passage of LD 1777, and which will be with the proposed amendment. Thank you.

Questions:

Does this open the door to a new wave of NEB projects?

No. Participation is limited to projects under 1MW that are consumer-owned. I am not aware of other cooperative initiatives, and the window for doing so is closing with the sunset of the investment tax credits.

Projects seeking the investment tax credit must begin construction before July 4, 2026, or otherwise reach commercial operation by the end of 2027.

Can't you wait for the NEB successor program?

We look forward to participating as an active stakeholder in the development of the NEB successor program, though when the new program will be launched is unclear. We need the ability to serve our members now, not some undefined time in the future.

What about ratepayer costs?

The data, including the most recent SEA report, clearly indicates that rooftop and other small-scale solar is a net benefit to ratepayers specifically, and Mainers overall. In this case, small-scale refers to the 1 acre projects, typically installed on single-phase power lines, not the much larger community solar projects typically envisioned as part of this debate.

We also must consider the consumer benefits provided under the consumer-ownership model, which are significantly more than under the investor-ownership model. When directed toward households experiencing the highest energy burden, like we do at Maine Community Power Cooperative, the net benefits far exceed any ratepayer costs.

As with all other customer-owned projects, all proceeds of our cooperative stay with the customer, and stay in the state's economy.