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Chair, Members of the Committee:

I am one of many people who have contributed many hours to our town's energy ordinances. A rigorous, thoughtful—and perhaps most importantly—transparent act of stewardship that this legislation seeks to void.

This amendment seeks to centralize permitting power with the state, and silence the over 60% of Maine communities who have taken the time to decide what kind of energy development we want (or don't) in place of our farms and forests.

This amended bill makes three structural changes to environmental permitting, and they are not minor.

First, it converts missed agency deadlines into automatic approval. If the Department does not act within the statutory timeframe, the permit is deemed approved.

Automatic approval does not mean review was completed. It means review was not completed in time. Environmental authorization should follow environmental findings — not the expiration of a deadline.

If agency capacity is the constraint, the solution is resourcing. It is not automatic authorization.

Second, the amendment imposes ceiling preemption on municipalities. Any ordinance more stringent than the state minimum is declared "void and of no force or effect." That language does not coordinate standards. It invalidates stricter local environmental protections.

Third, it expands permit-by-rule eligibility for large-scale solar development. Combined with deadline-driven approval, that narrows discretionary environmental review at scale.

These mechanisms operate together.

Deadlines compress review.
Permit-by-rule narrows scrutiny.
Preemption removes stricter local standards.

The bill is justified by renewable targets and anticipated load growth, but neglects to address the true sustainability that our woods and waters provide. We work very hard at the municipal level to steward these resources wisely.

When infrastructure scale increases, environmental precision should increase with it.

Centralization may be a policy choice. Uniformity may be a policy choice. But combining deadline-driven approval, expanded permit-by-rule, and invalidation of stricter local standards is a significant reallocation of authority at the very moment when project scale may increase.

Structural reallocations affecting environmental review should not be embedded in a second-session amendment and advanced before municipalities and the public have had meaningful opportunity to evaluate the full implications of the language.

I understand this proposal originated with counsel representing energy developers. Stakeholders routinely bring forward draft language. But when provisions that compress review timelines and invalidate stricter local protections originate from project-side counsel, it heightens this Committee's responsibility to scrutinize cumulative environmental impact — not just permitting efficiency.

This is not a technical adjustment.

It materially alters how environmental findings are reached — and how they can be bypassed.

Thank you.