

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Leo Hilton and I'm here today to speak in favor of L.D. 1818. I'm an apprentice electrical worker with IBEW local 567.

I've lived in Portland since I was a kid. I love my home, and it's been fascinating and often devastating to see my city grow and change for the last two decades. I came back to Maine when the pandemic began, more than three years ago, because I love this place, I love my community, and I want to build a life here. And I'm staying in Maine because our world is in crisis, and I want to be a part of the solution to those many crises for the community I love so much.

I chose to become an electrical worker because I wanted to use my mind and my body to serve my community, to build a public good: clean and safe power for everyone.

Portland has changed a lot in the last twenty years, and the contradictions that come with the economic development of my city have never been clearer. Our arts, culture, and food industry are more vibrant than I can ever remember, but the workers who make these industries possible can no longer afford to live in the city. I think this one example is emblematic of the problem: my union brothers and sisters are building brand new, luxury units on Hanover St. that look down on a massive encampment of my unhoused neighbors by the Bayside trail. And all this, all the luxury and misery are threatened by the crisis that subsumes and undergirds all others: climate catastrophe.

Because, every millimeter the sea level rises, the breweries, galleries, fancy flats, and encampment alike are that much closer to being flooded and swept away.

I bring all this up, because I know that offshore wind presents an opportunity and a choice for Maine. We have an opportunity to do our part in building a safe and clean future for ourselves and the world. We have a choice between building that future in a way that helps working people or in a way that accelerates the harm and exploitation of working people.

We have a chance through this bill to make sure that when the off shore wind boom comes to Maine, that working Mainers get to benefit, not just the owners of the companies that employ them. We have a chance to learn from the development in my city to make sure that economic development for some does not become poverty and exploitation for others.

We can empower workers and their communities through good, safe jobs, with family sustaining wages. Jobs where workers have a voice and power at work because they can come together in a union.

This past year, I worked building a substation in Portland — it's in the same easily flooded neighborhood as the luxury apartment and the encampments. It's the substation that powers Maine Medical Center, and also powers my house. I've never felt as fulfilled in my work as I did on that job, knowing that I was building the capacity for a green future for my community — and I want every Maine worker to have the chance to have that feeling of ownership and fulfillment in their work.

I hope you all want that for Maine workers as well. I urge you to support LD 1818.

Thank you