



Environmental Priorities Coalition

Testimony of the Environmental Priorities Coalition in Support of LD 2077
“An Act Regarding Customer Costs and the Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas”
January 23, 2024

Good afternoon Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler and esteemed members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee. My name is Beth Ahearn and I am testifying on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) in support of LD 2077, “An Act Regarding Customer Costs and the Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas.” Maine’s EPC is an inclusive statewide alliance of 34 conservation, climate action, and public health organizations. Each year the EPC collectively identifies a slate of policy priorities to act on the climate crisis, further environmental justice, protect land, water, and wildlife, and cultivate healthy Maine communities.

LD 2077 is a 2024 EPC priority that will protect ratepayers, public health, and our climate future: Maine’s fracked gas distribution system threatens our climate goals and public health. Fracked “natural” gas poses immediate and ongoing threats to health, and the expansion and indefinite operation of Maine’s gas system is inconsistent with statutory climate and clean energy goals. Methane, the major component of natural gas, is a climate super-pollutant that has more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over 20 years. Research shows that methane leaks from distribution mains, services, and appliances within the home are systematically undercounted – including by the EPA methodology currently used to account for Maine’s greenhouse gas emissions. Burning gas for cooking and heating creates indoor air pollution linked to asthma in children, exposes people to carcinogens like benzene, and contributes to the formation of ground-level ozone or smog. Poor air quality and the associated impacts are notoriously inequitable. Pre-existing and chronic health conditions exacerbated by air pollution are associated with race, income, and age.

Traditionally, gas utilities seek to expand their service areas and grow their customer bases and are entitled to recover the costs of these investments from ratepayers. This business-as-usual operation is inconsistent with major policy initiatives and funding opportunities promoting electrification, efficiency, and weatherization including *Maine Won’t Wait* and the Inflation Reduction Act. As more Maine people switch from volatile fossil fuel systems to high-efficiency electric heat pumps and cooktops, fewer ratepayers will remain on the gas system, and each individual ratepayer will bear a growing share of the costs of those investments. Because the timeline for Maine’s emissions reductions – 45% by 2030, 80% by 2050, and net-zero by 2045 – is shorter than the standard 50-year economic life of utility

infrastructure, ratepayers will be forced to keep paying for today's gas investments long after their useful lives. Continued expansion of the gas system would make this problem worse.

Thoughtful consideration and regulation of the gas distribution system will protect ratepayers, safeguard public health, and align Maine with statutory climate goals. LD 2077 would direct the state to investigate the costs to gas customers of gas system expansion; impacts to health and indoor air quality of fossil fuel combustion; and opportunities to redeploy Maine's existing gas infrastructure and workforce into geothermal heat districts. LD 2077 would also protect gas customers by prohibiting expansion of gas services into municipalities outside current gas utility service areas by January 2025 and prohibiting utility cost recovery from ratepayers for new gas service lines.

Please vote to reform the future of natural gas by voting Ought to Pass on LD 2077.