



Town of Wiscasset

Testimony of Dr. Sarah Whitfield, Chair of Wiscasset Board of Selectmen

February 6, 2024

As chair of the Wiscasset Board of Selectmen and on behalf of the Board, I am here today to express our support for LD 2027, "An Act to Clarify the Property Tax Exemption for Air Pollution Control Facilities".

For as long as I can remember, Maine Yankee has been a key piece of Wiscasset's economic history. The financial shocks of Maine Yankee's decommissioning in 1997 are still being felt in Wiscasset. Maine Yankee's effort to get out of its financial responsibility to our town in the form of property taxes are having a drastic impact on the town.

By its own language, Maine Yankee stores the spent nuclear fuel in an "Independent Spent Fuel Storage Facility," not an "air pollution control facility." The primary purpose of this operation is storage of the fuel pending transfer to the Federal Government at some point in the future. The idea that this kind of storage is not the primary purpose does not even pass the straight-face test, let alone a legal threshold. Making sure that spent fuel particles are not released from the canisters is just a basic level of safety, but it is not the primary purpose of the storage facility.

No other state exempts this kind of storage facility and classifies it as an air pollution control facility. The only entity who benefits from the Maine DEP's exception is Maine Yankee. The taxpayers of Wiscasset have gotten the short end of the stick and have to bear the consequences of Maine Yankee's poor planning. To give you a sense of the real-world implications of their exemption, for a Wiscasset taxpayer with a \$250,000 house, the Maine Yankee exemption means a more than \$500 increase in their individual tax bill.

In 27 years, not only has there been no progress on moving the spent nuclear fuel, there are no prospects in the immediate future. However, Maine Yankee still gets reimbursed by the Federal Government for the reasonable costs of owning and operating the storage facility including real estate taxes. The Town of Wiscasset does not receive any such support. Maine Yankee is a business and just because they did not financially plan for the indefinite storage of spent nuclear fuel, does not mean the citizens of Wiscasset should have to bear at least part of the expense.

Small towns like ours do all we can to be lean in our budgets and creative with how we provide services to our citizens. It is a slap in the face when a business like Maine Yankee does all it can to get out of its financial responsibility to the town. Its claimed exemption removes more than \$93 million from our tax rolls, a truly significant blow to our tax base. As a lifelong Mainer and native of Wiscasset, I have found that the majority of Mainers believe in holding up their end of a deal. Maine Yankee does not seem to hold that value. It is doing all it can to get out of its responsibility to our town.

Passing this bill simply makes Maine Yankee responsible for paying the costs of storing the spent nuclear fuel it created. It provides that the taxpayers of Wiscasset will be paid what they are owed. We implore you to make the right decision on behalf of this group of almost 4,000 residents of Maine and vote to move LD 2027 forward for a vote of the full Legislature. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sarah Whitfield
Chair, Wiscasset Board of Selectmen