



Testimony of Maine Labor Climate Council Executive Director, Francis Eanes, in support of LD 946, "Resolve, to Increase Access to Energy Efficiency Programs by Low-income and Moderate-income Residents"

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Francis Eanes and I'm here today to speak in support of LD 946. I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Labor Climate Council, a coalition of 20 labor unions here in the state of Maine working together to good jobs for all workers as our state transitions to clean energy.

Our state, like much of the world, is in the midst of the most profound energy transition since the industrial revolution. While we support the ambition of our state's leadership on this, it is critical that this transition tackle inequality just as rigorously as it tackles the climate crisis, and that we create a fairer and more just world on the other side.

It's clear from data supplied by federal agencies that uptake of federal tax credits for home weatherization and electrification has gone disproportionately to households at the upper end of the income ladder. Indeed, across all residential energy credits claimed in 2023, two thirds of the dollars flowed to households in the top 25% of national household income, while just 6% of the credits went to the bottom 50%. To its credit, Maine has done much better than this, but we can still do more — and we must do more — to ensure that our own state investments aimed at saving Mainers money on their utility bills goes to those in our state who face the highest energy burdens. The first two sections of this bill speak to this issue directly, and the fourth section — by fully utilizing federal dollars already slated for low-income weatherization — would provide much-needed *additional* resources to meet this important goal.

At the same time, as we ramp up the ambition and scale of the resources dedicated to this energy transition, it's essential we do so in a way that is managed and thoughtful. This matters not only because the workers most impacted deserve a just transition, but because we badly need their skills and experience to build out these new industries at scale. In other words, while we absolutely need to grow the clean energy workforce by recruiting and skilling up *new* workers, we just as urgently need to ensure a just and equitable transition that *retains* skilled workers who might already have 10 or 20 years of experience in a trade. If today's boiler technicians or gas workers have to take a significant pay cut to install heat pumps, EV charging infrastructure, or home insulation, we stand to lose a significant share of our already-trained workforce, which means we will take longer to reach the goals and targets laid out in the State's climate action plan.

Whether it's laborers, electricians, HVAC installers, welders, or countless other trades, public investment on this scale — and we're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars flowing through Efficiency Maine and Maine Housing combined per year — should ensure a skilled and trained

workforce. These investments should also recognize and build on the capacity of our state's existing Registered Apprenticeship infrastructure, an evidence-based training model that has unmatched capacity to ramp up a new workforce and retrain an incumbent workforce. In May of last year, the GEO published a report commissioned from the Building Performance Association — one of the country's leading weatherization trade groups — assessing the needs of Maine's weatherization industry. The surveyed 70 large and small weatherization contractors across our state. By far the most common challenge faced by these businesses is recruiting, hiring, and retaining a skilled workforce.

That's why section 3 of LD 946 is so important. By ensuring all employers that receive state-funded rebates pay prevailing wage, the State can ensure that its investment creates a level playing field for all contractors — one that encourages innovation and profitability through productivity gains rather than through squeezing the share of state resources that go to workers. Similarly, the Registered Apprenticeship component creates a framework for ensuring state-rebated employers are equally invested in recruiting, training, and retaining the next-generation workforce using the best practices of a proven model.

Some may have concerns that raising the standards in these sectors will slow down our progress on the energy transition. Although understandable, these concerns significantly underestimate the overall productivity gains that could be realized from more thoughtfully creating a bridge for incumbent workers to transition, by investing in a proven and scalable workforce development model for training *new* workers, and from retaining more workers of all kinds in these new sectors due to better wages and benefits.

Thank you for your consideration, and please vote Ought To Pass.