



Richard A. Bennett
Senator, District 18

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

**Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology on
LD 839, An Act to Lower Consumer Electricity Costs by Prohibiting the
Recovery Through Rates of Costs Attributable to Net Energy Billing
March 27, 2025**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford; and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am here to testify in support of LD 839, "An Act to Lower Consumer Electricity Costs by Prohibiting the Recovery Through Rates of Costs Attributable to Net Energy Billing."

In 2019, net energy billing was expanded to promote the development of solar energy resources. Instead of relying on the Public Utilities Commission to set the volumetric pricing for energy generated by solar, the statute linked it to the Standard Offer price, giving solar developers a guaranteed windfall of above-market pricing. This of course led to the profusion of solar arrays springing up across our state.

The Public Advocate has pointed out that the owners of these facilities – 88% out-of-state and increasingly Wall Street private equity entities – are getting paid 20 cents or more per kWh, while their production costs are less than 10 cents. This has led to the "stranded cost" line on electric bills to skyrocket. My office has received many calls from people struggling to make ends meet and distressed about the additional "Public Policy" charge.

Our program was so generous that it grew too big, too fast. To use a "Field of Dreams" reference, the state built it; and the developers did come – in droves. The Public Advocate testified to this committee just weeks ago that she expects this line to cost ratepayers at least \$240 million per year for the next 20 years, equaling \$4.8 billion over that period.

The current system is not equitable. It is beginning to collapse under its own weight.

I've heard from commercial customers and small business owners in South Paris and elsewhere in my district that their bills are spiking dramatically and will stay high until this issue is addressed. In one case, the business has normally paid \$6,000 per month and their new bill will be \$10,000 due specifically because of this "stranded cost". There have been several recent articles in the Bangor Daily News covering how this is harming businesses and even forcing them to close. You can read one such article at this [link](#).

I believe it is unfair to change rules once people have made expensive decisions – including investments – based upon them. But it is also unfair to require struggling Maine businesses and residential ratepayers to pay out-of-state private equity firms an over-market premium because of the Legislature's public policy choices.

These incredible rates fall disproportionately on some customers in an unfair way. If subsidizing renewable energy is going to be our state's policy, we cannot do so on the backs of small groups of people. Putting the cost of this program into a new Stabilization Fund within the General Fund is a much fairer solution.

I do want to be clear that I do not oppose solar or any other type of renewable development. I support smart solar and smart renewables that are affordable for my constituents. The current policy is not that. We want to encourage adoption of the beneficial electrified economy, and pushing these costs on ratepayers actually discourages people and businesses to electrify.

With electricity use expected to quadruple in Maine by 2050, we all need to lean into the challenges of creating a smart, efficient grid and better functioning utilities. We also need a smooth transition to clean energy generation that is fair and equitable for all.

I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 839. Thank you for your consideration today.