

Testimony of Scott Vlaun in Opposition to:

LD 1321: An Act to Reform Net Energy Billing by Establishing Limitations on the Programs' Duration and Compensation

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and members of the Committee.

As the climate crisis bears down upon our state, the country, and the entire planet, it is increasingly clear that enhancing grid resiliency while reducing greenhouse gas emissions is essential for our climate future. Well-conceived net energy billing policy is imperative for Maine to meet our share of these critical goals.

My name is Scott Vlaun, I'm the Executive Director for the Center for an Ecology-Based Economy in Norway, and board president of Maine Community Power Cooperative. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you in opposition to this bill, one which will move Maine decisively in the wrong direction. Opposition to this bill is not abstract for us. If passed, LD1321 will undo thousands of hours of hard work by our staff, board, and volunteers.

For over seven years, CEBE has worked to bring equitable access to clean solar power to Maine people and businesses, especially those without a suitable location or financial capital to install their own. Our Norway landfill site has lowered energy costs for 18 local businesses and a local elementary school. Last year, with the award of over five million in federal and state funding, we incorporated Maine Community Power Cooperative to provide affordable clean energy to Maine households, especially those with low incomes. Installation of our first projects are slated for this spring. Our ambitions for growth are immense.

Our innovative consumer-owned model, utilizing state-of-the-art dual-axis solar tracker technology was selected by the U.S. Department of Energy as one of 19 funded projects from a pool of over 650 applicants to their Energy Improvements to Rural and Remote Areas program. Its benefits are myriad: It will reduce and stabilize energy costs for consumer/owners and provide generous lease income to landowners, keeping energy dollars in our local economies; it will enhance rather than compromise our valuable farmland and trial various agrivoltaic models; it will put dozens of Mainers to work with good jobs and provide education and training through agreements with our local tech school, UMaine, and other workforce training programs.

Furthermore, our network of small projects of just under 200 kW DC utilizes existing space on single phase power lines with simple and inexpensive level two interconnection, and helps stabilize the grid by providing power during peak demand. We have identified hundreds of suitable sites and have interconnection agreements for our first four.

Without net energy billing, this project dies, workers are laid off, and the dream of affordable clean energy ends for current and future members/owners. We implore you to vote "ought not to pass" on this ill-conceived bill, and to protect net-energy billing for community-driven solar projects like ours for decades to come.

Thank You!