

Testimony on LD1860

An Act to Allow Certain Distributed Energy Resources to Participate in the State's Net Energy Billing Program

Good afternoon, Chairs Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and distinguished members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee. My name is Sam Collins, and I am here with Carl Soderberg on behalf of Nordic Sun, a group of local businesspeople from Caribou, that are deeply vested in their community. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of LD1860. Nordic Sun formed to provide a discount on electrical power for local businesses in the Maine Public district of Versant in the County. Our introduction to solar power began in 2019 when we worked together to provide affordable housing for Seniors in Caribou. We renovated an abandoned school in Caribou and converted it to thirty-eight units for Senior Living and chose to power the facility with behind the meter solar power. All the power is consumed by the housing project. We did not use the NEB program for this solar project. This project did spark significant interest from other local businesses looking to lower their energy costs. Looking to save money in our respective businesses and allowing local manufacturers, restaurants, grocery stores, packing sheds and farmers to take advantage of discounts on their electrical bills, we investigated and moved forward with the construction of a three-megawatt project in Presque Isle on land that was unsuitable for farming and any other commercial enterprise.

Nordic Sun initiated the application process and had the first meetings with Versant in May of 2021. Nordic Sun started construction in August of 2021. Our project is fully constructed, financed through a local bank, built using local contractors, and supported by local suppliers. We have invested **millions of dollars** in Aroostook County and paid **over \$500,000** to Versant to upgrade grid infrastructure in preparation for interconnection. The project has received **Permission to Operate (PTO)** and became commercially operational by **December 31, 2024**, meeting the deadline we had consistently been advised was required to qualify for the Net Energy Billing program. However, in mid-December 2024, Versant informed us that our project **would not** qualify for the Net Energy Billing program—despite previous assurances to the contrary. This decision was deeply disappointing and disruptive. We had already partnered with local grocers, farmers, restaurateurs, and manufacturers, all of whom had committed to and were relying on substantial long-term savings—**potentially millions of dollars over 20 years**—through participation in the program.

The scope of the legislation is narrowly drafted to apply only to Nordic Sun's small project and one other uniquely situated project. Our project was developed in good faith, with significant local investments and we were **disadvantaged due to delays beyond our control in the interconnection study process of Versant's Maine Public district.**

We are in a uniquely difficult position, as the Maine Public district of Versant is not **connected to ISO New England** as are projects in the majority of Maine. In Aroostook County we are an island that is dependent on power transmission through New Brunswick, Canada. This 150-mile disconnect leaves us unable to sell excess generation out of state, a flexibility that is available to other solar developers in Maine.

We respectfully urge your support for LD 1860. It corrects unintended inequity and allows locally generated power to be used as intended—by the community that built it.

Thank you for your time and attention. We are happy to answer any questions.