



Senator Lawrence  
Representative Sachs  
Members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

**RE: Support of LD 1792 – An Act Regarding the Energy Policy of the State, and LD 1936, An Act to Provide Greater Equity in and Reduce Costs Related to the State’s Net Energy Billing Program**

My name is Eric Venturini and I’m the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine testifying in support of these bills.

The Wild Blueberry Commission (WBCM) works on behalf of Maine’s 512<sup>1</sup> farms who grow wild blueberries on 47,600<sup>1</sup> acres across the State. In 2024, Maine produced approximately 85 million pounds of wild blueberries representing nearly 100% of all *wild* blueberries and approximately 10% of all *blueberries* grown in the US. Our industry contributes \$361 million dollars to the state’s economy annually<sup>2</sup> and is the only state with significant commercial production of wild blueberries.

Today, the industry is confronting head-on a host of challenges. The global cultivated blueberry industry, of a size with the Maine wild industry 20 years ago, now annually produces 45 times Maine’s production. The producer price index, a measure of the cost of doing business, hit records levels in ‘21, ‘22, and ‘23. Producers are still struggling with dramatically higher costs even as pressure from cheaper Canadian wild blueberry imports and global cultivated blueberries depress our markets. Grower profits have been below break-even for most growers for two years. The cost of labor continues to rise, and Maine’s energy costs are among the highest in the country.

Our wild blueberry producers already struggle to compete with cheap imports of frozen cultivated blueberries from Chile, wild blueberries imported from Canada, and domestically grown ordinary cultivated blueberries. The energy costs charged to these competitors vary, but Maine’s are among the highest. Our energy costs are 32% higher than the national average, 10<sup>th</sup> highest in the country,<sup>3</sup> and as much as twice the cost of energy in Chile. When the Maine legislature passed the Net Energy Billing (NEB) program, some of our businesses were alerted that certain meters could see another 700-800% increase in costs.

We’d like to thank Senator Grohoski, the sponsor of both bills, for her ongoing substantial efforts to fix NEB, and reduce the dramatic impacts seen by some businesses by these programs. LD 1936 is expected to reduce the total costs of NEB by at least 50% while LD 1792 will help to resolve the disproportionate allocation of NEB costs to Maine businesses. We believe that these two bills could repair this program and alleviate its impacts, while also honoring the original intent of the program.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide this testimony.

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<sup>1</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2022. Berries: 2022. United States Census of Agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> Camoine Associates. Unpublished Data. Economic and Fiscal Impacts of the Maine Wild Blueberry Industry. Wild Blueberry Association of North America – US, October 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Maine Economic Growth Council. 2023. Measures of Growth, Performance Measures and Benchmarks to Achieve a Vibrant and Sustainable Economy for Maine, 2023. Administered by the Maine Development Foundation, Hallowell, ME.