



Environmental Priorities Coalition

Testimony in support of LD1949, *An Act Regarding Energy Fairness*

May 15, 2025

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and distinguished member of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities & Technology, my name is Cathy Breen. I am here today to speak on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), an inclusive statewide alliance of 39 conservation, climate action, and public health organizations that is marking its 20th anniversary this year. Each year we work together to develop and identify a slate of policy priorities to act on the climate crisis, further environmental justice, protect land, water, and wildlife, and cultivate healthy Maine communities. This is a lengthy and rigorous process that takes place over the summer and fall before each legislative session. For this current session, the EPC has prioritized LD1949, *An Act Regarding Energy Fairness*.

Many of us in the EPC are alarmed and frustrated by the high energy burden that our low-income neighbors face every month in their energy bills. "Energy burden" is the percentage of household income devoted to paying for energy. According to a 2024 study commissioned by the Maine Office of the Public Advocate, "Maine's low-income households have a high energy burden: The average (mean) home energy burden for low-income households is 19 percent. On average, low-income households in the state far exceed the thresholds for the various definitions of energy poverty (generally starting with a minimum energy burden in the range of 6 to 10 percent of household income). In comparison, we find in our analysis that the average home energy burden for all Maine households is 6 percent."¹ This fact coupled with one other gives us further cause for alarm: a key provision of the Maine Climate Council's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is to transition Maine's energy systems to clean energy sources and electrify transportation and heating. **We cannot support a transition to clean energy that unfairly burdens Mainers who struggle the most to make ends meet. And this is why we support LD1949.**

LD1949 will protect customers from high energy bills right now and pave the way to bring more affordable clean energy onto the grid to lower them in the future. It will also improve

transparency and reporting by utilities that will help the legislature develop good energy policy reform. These provisions will align Maine with other states like Georgia, Colorado, and Connecticut and are considered “best practices.”

Lastly, LD1949 will protect vulnerable households whose health and safety rely on consistent electricity due to medical conditions, age or disability by protecting against disconnections. Expanding protections has never been more critical, as energy burden is projected to rise, each person’s benefit will decrease as we move to automatic enrollment, and federal low-income assistance programs have recently come under threat.

For all of these reasons, the 39 members of the EPC urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD1949. Thank you for your consideration.

LD 1949: ENERGY FAIRNESS ACT

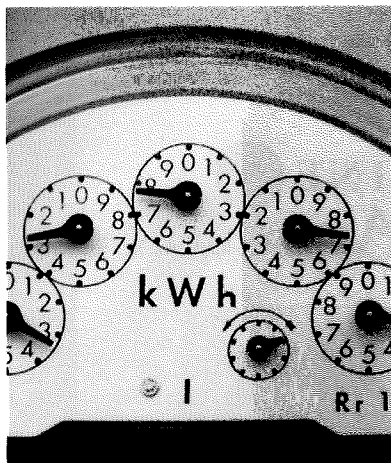
Fight for the rights of Maine families to be free from dangerous service shutoffs, rising utility costs, and predatory advertising.

Extreme weather, the soaring price of natural gas, and current utility policies have made electricity unaffordable for too many Maine people.

- In 2023, Maine electric utilities sent 440,000 disconnection notices to Maine families.¹ They made over \$200 million in profit in the same year.²
- Low-income Mainers spend 14% of their income on household energy costs, more than twice what is considered affordable.³
- Over the past five years, Maine had the fastest-rising electricity costs in the nation. Volatile natural gas prices, climate-fueled storm damage, and utility profit structure have been primary drivers of these increases.



It's long past time for everyone in Maine to have the energy they need to reach their potential.



- Maine is at a critical inflection point, where we must invest to make our electric grid cleaner and more resilient, while also making energy more affordable for families and small businesses.
- Universal access to electricity is imperative to a just transition to a clean economy and to meeting our statutory climate goals.
- Transitioning to clean electricity through Maine's Renewable Portfolio Standard has already resulted in enormous investment and \$21.5 million annually in ratepayer benefits, yet low-income Mainers remain vulnerable.⁴
- Electric utilities can't disconnect customers during the winter or extreme weather, but vulnerable populations including older people and infants have no year-round protections, and those with chronic illness can lose access to medically-necessary electricity after a three month period.

Maine can take big steps to lower bills and fight for universal electricity access by addressing the real drivers of rising costs.

- This bill would expand protections from utility disconnection to include older people, infants, and those with chronic medical conditions -- because no one should have to choose between keeping the lights on and securing food and medicine.
- It would require utilities to report data on disconnections and customer debt, providing the public and policymakers the information we need to fight for universal electricity access.
- The bill would also ensure that competitive electricity providers cannot trick low-income customers into higher rates with predatory advertising.

Establish energy rights. Lower costs and protect Maine people.

For more information, please contact
Lucy Hochschartner, Maine Conservation Voters, at (518) 637-7839 or lucy@maineconservation.org

1. <https://www.maine.gov/meopa/about/news/maine-public-advocate-urges-low-income-electric-customers-seek-help-bills>
2. E.g., https://s24.q4cdn.com/489945429/files/doc_downloads/2024/11/CMP-FERC-Form-1-2023.pdf; https://elibrary.ferc.gov/eLibrary/filelist?accession_number=20240722-8002
3. https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/VEIC_Maine%20Energy%20Burden%20and%20Affordability%202024_2.pdf
4. <https://www.maine.gov/energy/sites/maine.gov.energy/files/inline-files/Maine-RPS-Impacts-and-Procurement-Policy-Options-Report-Master-FINAL.pdf>



Environmental Priorities Coalition

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Gateway Community Services Maine



GREATER PORTLAND



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