



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY RESOURCES
62 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0062

JANET MILLS
GOVERNOR

DAN BURGESS
ACTING COMMISSIONER
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY RESOURCES

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ENERGY, UTILITIES AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

An Act to Make Small, Portable, Plug-in Solar Generation Devices Accessible for All Maine Residents to Address the Energy Affordability Crisis L.D. 1730

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY RESOURCES
January 6, 2026

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology (EUT): My name is Caroline Colan, and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Department of Energy Resources (DOER).

The DOER testifies in support of L.D. 1730.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in general support of L.D. 1730, as amended.

“Plug-in solar” refers to small, low-cost solar systems—typically one or a few panels—designed for balconies or small outdoor spaces. These systems allow those without traditional rooftop systems or access to these, such as renters and residents of multi-unit buildings, to access the benefits of on-site solar. While not intended to power an entire home, plug-in solar can offset a portion of specific household loads and reduce electricity bills.

Similar, ~800-watt systems have seen rapid adoption in Germany, with nearly 800,000 registered installations since 2019.¹ In the U.S., however, market development has been limited by the absence of clear safety standards and regulatory requirements that can make installations costly and complex.

The sponsor’s amendment, which we understand to be modeled after legislation enacted in Utah and under consideration in several other state legislatures, establishes clear definitions, system capacity limits, and technical requirements to enable safe adoption while limiting barriers and costs by exempting eligible systems from interconnection processes. Of particular importance is the reliance on nationally recognized electrical safety standards, including the National Electrical Code and UL-listed equipment, as well as provisions that prevent backfeeding to the grid during outages.

At the household level, adoption of these systems can lower monthly energy costs by a small portion, and if paired with batteries, can provide resilience benefits. At significant scale, broader adoption could ease grid burdens.

¹ <https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/solar/balcony-panels-germany-utah>



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As the proposal moves forward, DOER encourages continued focus on three critical areas. First, household safety must remain paramount through clear certification standards. Second, utility worker safety must be protected by preventing grid energization during outages. And third, grid reliability should remain a guiding principle, with capacity limits and notification requirements enabling utilities to maintain situational awareness without creating unnecessary barriers for customers.

We also recommend close coordination with the State Building Official (Maine Office of Community Affairs), Electricians Examining Board, and building code officials, particularly as it relates to installations in multi-unit residential buildings. Should these systems take off in Maine, it will be important for consumers installing these devices to be aware of best practices for safe installation, such as hiring a licensed electrician or getting a state inspection for electrical work completed, ensuring installed systems don't impact building integrity, and confirming purchased devices meet the outlined certification standards.

In closing, careful implementation of L.D. 1730, which provides a path for enabling these systems in Maine and developing a market without dedicated incentives, is a constructive step toward expanding access to clean energy while maintaining safety and reliability.

Thank you for your consideration.

Caroline Colan, Legislative Liaison
Department of Energy Resources