

Testimony of Ashley Luszczki
Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
LD 2174, An Act to Increase Predictability in the Permitting of
Renewable Energy Development
February 25, 2026

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Ashley Luszczki and I am providing testimony on behalf of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, the state's largest business association. The Chamber supports innovation, economic competitiveness, and a predictable regulatory environment where businesses can thrive. LD 2174 advances these goals by establishing clear and predictable timelines for energy development. For these reasons, the Chamber is providing testimony in support of the bill as amended with some recommendations to ensure that Maine's regulatory environment works for our existing hydropower resources.

Predictability in permitting is central to projects being financed and built. Lengthy and open-ended review timelines create uncertainty for investors and developers, increasing project risk that can directly translate into increased project costs. Those added costs do not disappear; they are reflected in project pricing and, over time, in the rates paid by Maine households and employers. By requiring the Commissioners of the Departments of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to issue decisions within a defined time, LD 2174 provides regulatory certainty without compromising environmental review standards.

From an economic development and workforce perspective, predictable timelines keep projects on schedule as they allow engineers, contractors, and material suppliers to plan accordingly. As we've heard at both energy and environmental events here in Maine, we are competing with other states for energy investments. Ultimately, capital will flow to states where standards are clear and decisions are timely. While the work being done by the Department of Environmental Protection with their new Maine Enterprise Licensing System provides transparency for where permits are in the process, the defined timelines this legislation outlines will position Maine as a place where energy infrastructure can be developed responsibly and efficiently.

The Chamber recognizes the concerns around local control, and we respect the important role municipalities play in land use and community planning. At the same time, we have seen some municipalities enact moratoriums or alter land use retroactively in a manner that limits private property owners and undermines critical statewide energy projects from the Northeast Clean Energy, natural gas facilities, and renewable projects. Electricity generation, storage, and transmission affect grid reliability, affordability, and economic growth statewide. As we have

seen with other forms of development, a patchwork of varying or more restrictive local requirements layered on top of state standards creates inconsistency, and with energy projects the impacts are felt by ratepayers and businesses alike. Importantly, LD 2174 maintains public input and municipal participation while creating a consistent statewide framework.

Finally, while we support the intent of the bill, we believe it should be amended to ensure it is technology neutral, at a minimum across all renewable energy sources and ideally across all energy types consistent with statewide climate plans. Maine's energy future depends on a mix of resources, including hydropower, biomass, and emerging technologies alongside solar, wind, and storage. Providing predictable permitting timelines for some renewable resources but not others risks distorting investment decisions and limiting innovation. A uniform framework applied to all renewable energy technologies would better position Maine to meet load growth, support economic development, and address pressing affordability challenges.

In addition, we must create a regulatory framework that not only promotes new investment but also supports retaining our existing renewable resources. Regrettably, we have heard from hydropower owners that the regulatory environment is currently untenable. Maine's largest renewable resource is hydropower and any study planning our clean energy future has assumed that these facilities will remain operationally. We would recommend a legislative study to review the regulatory framework governing hydropower relicensing and ensure that we are balancing the clean energy contributions, the economic benefits, along with the environmental impacts.

At a time when energy costs remain a top concern for all ratepayers, Maine cannot afford unnecessary delay in bringing new generation online. LD 2174 would move us toward a more predictable, competitive, and affordable energy future, and with a technology-neutral adjustment, it can do so fairly and effectively.