

**TESTIMONY OF THORN C. DICKINSON
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF NECEC TRANSMISSION LLC**

LD 471 - An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands

March 18, 2021

Testifying: **In Opposition**

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Thorn C. Dickinson, President and CEO of NECEC Transmission LLC (“NECEC LLC”), presenting testimony in opposition to LD 471 An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands.

This bill specifically targets the New England Clean Energy Connect transmission project (“NECEC” or the “Project”) under construction by NECEC LLC. The NECEC is the largest clean energy project in New England. Once NECEC is in service, it will deliver 1,200 megawatts of clean, reliable power from Canada to Maine and the region.

The NECEC will provide substantial benefits to Maine, its electricity customers and residents, including, among other:

- significant wholesale electricity price reductions;
- enhanced system reliability, diversity, and security of energy in Maine, supporting the development of other renewable sources and helping to safeguard the state during extreme weather and regional power outages;
- environmental benefits by displacing fossil fuel generation in the region and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (the equivalent to at least 700,000 fewer cars on the road);
- macroeconomic benefits, including an increase in the state’s gross domestic product by more than a half-billion dollars during construction and an estimated \$18 million per year increase in property tax revenues for Project host communities;
- creation of more than 1,600 jobs during the NECEC construction phase;
- conservation of nearly 43,000 acres of land in western Maine; and
- additional benefits totaling approximately \$250 million during construction and over the life of the Project, including \$140 million in direct rate relief, \$15 million for fiber optic and broadband expansion, \$15 million for heat pumps, \$15 million for electric vehicles, \$6 million for education grants, \$5 million for host community support and \$50 million for low-income consumer rate relief.

The NECEC has been subject to a thorough multi-year review by state and federal agencies entrusted with the review and permitting of energy infrastructure projects, including by the Maine Public Utilities Commission (“MPUC” or the “Commission”), Maine Department of Environmental Protection (“MDEP”), Maine Land Use Planning Commission (“MLUPC”), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (“USACE”) and U.S. Department of Energy (“DOE”). **After thorough**

review by these agencies, the NECEC has received the state and federal permits that it requires to start construction.

In Maine, after a 19-month proceeding, in which 31 parties intervened, eight rounds of pre-filed testimony were filed, with written discovery and technical conferences held after every phase of testimony, six days of evidentiary hearings, and three public witness hearings at which over 100 witnesses testified, **the MPUC granted the certificate of public convenience and necessity (CPCN) for the NECEC on May 3, 2019. The Commission assessed the public need and carefully weighted the benefits and costs of the NECEC to ratepayers and residents of Maine. The MPUC concluded that the Project will provide substantial benefits to Maine and that it is in the public interest, a decision that was affirmed by the Maine Law Court on March 17, 2020.**

From an environmental review perspective, starting on the second half of 2017, MDEP and MLUPC conducted coordinated proceedings. Thirty-nine parties participated in these proceedings, filing thousands of pages of sworn testimony from dozens of witnesses and participating in six days of evidentiary hearings. In addition to those parties, hundreds of Maine citizens testified during two public hearings and submitted written comments. After more than two years of public input and careful review of the Project, on January 8, 2020 the MLUPC certified the Project based on land use standards. On May 11, 2020, **after thoroughly assessing the Project's environmental, scenic, aesthetic, and recreational impacts, the MDEP approved the NECEC under the Site Location of Development Act and the Natural Resources Protection Act.** In its Order, the MDEP made numerous findings regarding the Project's effect on the environment, including that the NECEC will not unreasonably interfere with existing scenic, aesthetic, recreational, or navigational uses; will not cause unreasonable erosion of soil or sediment; will not unreasonably harm any significant wildlife habitat, freshwater wetland plant habitat, threatened or endangered plant habitat, aquatic habitat, travel corridor, freshwater, estuarine, or marine fisheries or other aquatic life; and will not unreasonably cause or increase the flooding of the alteration area or adjacent properties. The MDEP considered and ordered measures, which will be implemented by the Project, to avoid certain impacts and to minimize, mitigate, and compensate others.

In addition to the substantial oversight and review of the Project by agencies in Maine, on the federal front the NECEC has been reviewed and, after careful consideration by federal agencies, has received the required approvals from USACE and DOE. On November 6, 2020, USACE granted the permits for the Project under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of Rivers & Harbors Act of 1899, followed by the issuance of the Presidential Permit for the NECEC by DOE on January 14, 2021.

The Legislature should not take an action specifically intended to hinder a project that will provide significant benefits to Maine, that has already been thoroughly and carefully analyzed and, after a multi-year process and substantial public input, approved by the state and federal agencies in charge of its review.

I, therefore, respectfully, urge the Committee to set aside this proposed legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.