

Testimony on LD 856: An Act To Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation

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Honorable Committee Chairs Senator Dill & Representative O'Neil and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on *LD 856 – An Act To Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation*.

Acadia Center is a non-profit, research and advocacy organization incorporated in Maine and committed to advancing the clean energy future by offering real-world solutions to the climate crisis. Acadia Center tackles complex problems, identifies clear recommendations for reforms, and advocates to create significant change that supports a low-carbon economy across the Northeast which can then be a model for application elsewhere. Acadia Center identifies regional, state, and local improvements that will dramatically reduce carbon pollution and improve quality of life throughout the Northeastern United States.

Acadia Center supports LD 856.

LD 856 advances the recommendations of the Agricultural Solar Stakeholder Group and a number of strategies in *Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action*, which called for “develop[ing] policies by 2022 to ensure renewable energy project siting is streamlined and transparent while seeking to minimize impacts on natural and working lands and engaging key stakeholders.” Acadia Center strongly supports renewable energy development that is properly sited and avoids negative impacts to Maine’s natural resources, including agricultural lands and forests.

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with state climate targets, Maine must rapidly increase the rate of deployment of renewable energy and the transmission and distribution infrastructure needed to support it. However, while projects must be located where resource and land availability are best, we must also consider impacts on agricultural uses, forests, wildlife, and other natural resources. We need a new state approach to climate planning and support frameworks that address renewable energy challenges that better address community concerns and involve a larger number of community voices and more representatives of diverse constituencies in siting processes.

The report on which this bill is based recommended a series of actions, including authorizing dual-use pilot programs for solar installations on farmland, additional technical support for municipality planning and permitting, additional staffing at relevant state agencies, a publicly-accessible database of energy projects in the state that would help identify land use and other energy trends, inclusion of agricultural and natural resource stakeholders in existing conversations about future solar policy in Maine, and other positive provisions. LD 856 is a positive step towards adopting such policies and processes.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 856. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

For more information:

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