



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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Testimony in Support of LD 856, An Act To Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation

**To the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
by Jack Shapiro, Climate & Clean Energy Program Director
March 1, 2022**

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is Jack Shapiro, I’m the Climate and Clean Energy Program Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine, and I’m here to in support of LD 856, An Act To Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation.

We appreciate the work of the Agricultural Solar working group, the DACF, the sponsor, and the Committee for their recommendations and for bringing forward this bill.

Meeting Maine’s climate and clean energy goals is a big job and will require a significant build-out of renewable energy, as well as other elements of energy infrastructure. While public support for renewable energy and action on climate change are high, support for the development of specific projects is by no means a guarantee.

The construction of a power sector that reduces our dependence on expensive fossil fuels and lessens the risk of dangerous climate impacts to Maine people and communities needs to be done in a way that considers appropriate siting, keeps costs reasonable, and provides clear climate and community benefits.

This bill takes several common-sense steps forward that we support.

First, creating a public database of energy projects will fill a significant data gap, allowing policymakers and advocates to identify and respond to trends and learn from our experience as we build the renewable energy we need to meet our statutory clean energy goals.

The dual-use pilot project is a first step toward understanding how we can maximize the productive use of land by co-locating energy and agricultural production. While renewable energy technologies like solar are well understood, there is much to learn about how to make

projects that combine agriculture and horticulture with energy generation both economical and productive.

Finally we support the provision directing the Governor's Energy Office to include specific siting work sessions with participation from representatives from natural resource agencies and stakeholders representing agricultural and natural resource interests in the ongoing work of the distributed generation (DG) stakeholder group. Those conversations could be extremely valuable in providing thoughtful consideration of policy mechanisms to encourage appropriately sited renewable energy projects. However we suggest that the Committee work to more closely align the timelines included in this bill with the timelines laid out in the DG stakeholder group's interim report. For example, the bill requires siting meetings to be convened by September 1, but the working group's interim report indicates that their issue-focused work sessions will provide recommendations to the full working group by mid-2022. This is so those recommendations can be incorporated into a draft report, released for public comment, and made final in the stakeholder group's final report due by the end of the year.

We are confident that Maine people recognize that addressing climate change and fully reaping the benefits of the clean energy transition will mean building new energy and transmission and distribution infrastructure. At NRCM, we believe that we can and must do this in a way that benefits communities and minimizes impacts. This bill provides several positive steps forward, which is why we respectfully encourage the Committee to support this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.