



Testimony in Support of LD 551, An Act To Accelerate Weatherization Efforts in the State
by
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Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and distinguished members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee. My name is Sue Ely. I am a staff attorney at the Natural Resources Council of Maine, and I am pleased to testify today in support of LD 551, *An Act To Accelerate Weatherization Efforts in the State*.

As you likely know, heating, cooling, and lighting our buildings is responsible for approximately one-third of Maine's greenhouse gas emissions. Old and drafty buildings across Maine that need weatherization investments aren't just harming the climate, they're costing individuals, businesses, and towns millions of dollars in avoidable energy costs. Mainers pay more for heating than any other state in the nation because of our older homes and heavy reliance on heating oil. Weatherization can reduce the amount that individuals, businesses, and municipalities pay to heat their buildings while dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, weatherization is one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

LD 551 would update Maine law (35-A MRSA §10104(4)(F)) to align the Efficiency Maine Trust's (Trust) objectives with the recently released climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*. The new objective would be to weatherize 17,500 homes and businesses by 2025 and 35,000 homes and businesses by 2030, including 1,000 low-income housing units per year from 2022 to 2030. This statutory change would provide concrete and measurable objectives to help ensure that adequate progress is being made to achieve the greenhouse gas emission reductions required under Maine law.

LD 551 also adds a definition for "low-income" to the Efficiency Maine Trust Act, which does raise some concerns.

While this definition is very similar to the definition currently used by the Trust, the Trust has employed minor variations to its definition of "low-income" individuals to match unique circumstances for different opportunities and programs.

For example, low-income programs using Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative funds are made available to homes with an assessed value below a certain level. This approach is useful, but the proposed definition in LD 551 might override this approach.

Similarly, low-income initiatives funded by the Electric Efficiency and Conservation Fund are limited to customers of a transmission and distribution utility receiving benefits under the utility's program to assist low-income customers, or a household that has qualified at any time in the prior 12-month period to receive assistance through any state or federal program in which low income and/or limited assets are criteria for eligibility. This approach for determining eligibility for this source also has merits, and also might be undermined by LD 551.

The proposed new definition for "low-income" would be narrower than either of these two examples and could constrain the Trust's ability to direct funds to Mainers who are unlikely to be able to take advantage of the Trust programs except through the low-income programming.

We recommend either removing the low-income definition from LD 551 or making it clear that the definition provides a floor but not a ceiling for who can qualify and provides the Trust with the authority to expand eligibility by rule.

NRCM strongly supports the Trust's effort to lower energy costs through weatherization and is pleased to support LD 551 to align the Trust's objectives with the Maine Climate Council's weatherization targets for homes and businesses.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 551 and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.