



Testimony before the

Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

By Rob Wood, Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy

March 16, 2021

Re: LD 583 – An Act To Repeal the Changes Made by Public Law 2019, Chapter 478, "An Act To Promote Solar Energy Projects and Distributed Generation Resources in Maine"

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Rob Wood and I am the Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify **in opposition to LD 583**, An Act To Repeal the Changes Made by Public Law 2019, Chapter 478, "An Act To Promote Solar Energy Projects and Distributed Generation Resources in Maine".

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. We have been working in Maine for more than 60 years with a focus on protecting land, restoring rivers and streams, rebuilding groundfish populations in the Gulf of Maine and developing innovative solutions to address climate change.

Net energy billing, as re-enabled by the 2019 solar law in Maine, has been essential to supporting the growth of distributed, small-scale solar in Maine and across the U.S. It is easy to understand and provides a clear pathway for customers to recoup their investment in the solar array over a reasonable time horizon.

Solar power, in turn, is essential to achieving the carbon emissions reductions we know are necessary to avoid the worst effects of climate change on people and the environment. That is why The Nature Conservancy opposes the repeal of net energy billing and other elements of the solar law passed in Maine in 2019; we can't afford to remove tools from the toolbox when it comes to addressing climate change.

However, we also believe it is fair, and important, to calibrate climate and clean energy policies to achieve the State's desired outcomes at the lowest cost. Using this rubric, net energy billing and distributed generation procurements may be better suited for some circumstances than others. As policymakers consider the best approach to supporting solar development to meet Maine's climate goals, we offer the following principles for consideration:

- Customers and developers who are currently enrolled, or in the line to be enrolled, in a program such as net energy billing, should be held harmless if policies are changed midstream.
- Policies must be strong enough to ensure that an adequate supply of clean energy is developed to meet the State's emissions reduction targets. We should err on the side of caution, with caution in this case defined as making sure we don't fall short of our climate goals.
- Land use and habitat values should be taken into account when weighing the costs and benefits of any policy approach and designing or redesigning clean energy policies. Although we need solar to achieve our climate targets, clean energy facilities can take up a lot of space on the landscape, so it is important to consider ways to craft programs like net energy billing and clean energy procurements to reflect the value of well-sited solar development to Maine's people and the environment.
- Similarly, it is important to capture the full suite of costs and benefits associated with solar development. In addition to direct ratepayer impacts, emissions reductions and land use implications, policies should ideally account for the other values solar can provide to the grid, such as reducing the need for new transmission and distribution infrastructure that all ratepayers pay for.
- Policies should be designed to ensure equitable outcomes for Mainers, including an explicit focus on programs to increase support for low-income ratepayers, such as an expansion of the Low-Income Assistance Programs (LIAPs) currently offer by Maine's utilities.

Achieving these goals can be accomplished without a repeal of Maine's 2019 solar law. We look forward to working with the Committee as this discussion moves forward. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.