



**Testimony of the Efficiency Maine Trust
Michael D. Stoddard, Executive Director**

**IN FAVOR OF
*LD 815 – An Act To Support School Decarbonization***

Presented to the Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology (EUT)

April 6, 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and Members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, the Efficiency Maine Trust (the Trust) appreciates the opportunity to testify today in favor of *LD 815 – An Act To Support School Decarbonization*.

In 2019, the Maine Legislature enacted [LD 1282](#). Among other provisions, LD 1282 created the School Solar Energy Program, calling on the Trust to conduct competitive solicitations for power purchase agreements (PPAs) for solar systems to be added to a very limited number of new school construction projects. This bill was passed prior to [LD 1711 – An Act To Promote Solar Energy Projects and Distributed Generation Resources in Maine](#) and [LD 1494 - An Act To Reform Maine's Renewable Portfolio Standard](#), both of which were also passed in 2019.

In preparation for drafting a rule by which to implement the School Solar Energy Program, the Trust sought preliminary stakeholder input through a Request for Information (RFI). Responses to the RFI from the solar vendor community, attorneys for schools, and the Department of Education revealed several concerns with the Program. Chief among these concerns was the fact that the Program would likely require schools to accept an inferior deal to one they might access on the open market under the newly enacted Net Energy Billing (NEB) or renewables “procurement” policies (together with the federal investment tax credit). The Program prescribed, per LD 1282, on-site production of solar, limited to a relatively small size limit, and that the PPA rate be set equal to the avoided cost rate. These provisions were predicted to be more complicated, and less economically attractive, than what many schools were already demonstrating they could achieve through the NEB and solar procurement policies.

After conferring with stakeholders, the Trust reached out to LD 1282’s sponsor, Senator Maxmin, to discuss alternative ways to advance the original bill’s intent of helping schools reduce their energy costs and carbon emissions. We observed that while other policies already offer financial incentives for schools seeking to develop or purchase distributed renewables, schools often find the process complex and confusing and require “soft” costs associated with various professional services to guide them through the process. We also observed that with the growing awareness of the Maine Climate Council’s action plan “Maine Won’t Wait,” schools might appreciate receiving support for pursuing a wide variety of energy projects to reduce their carbon emissions.

LD 815 represents an effort to overcome some of the process barriers for a broad range of energy-related projects, including but not limited to solar. It expands the scope of the Trust's existing School Energy Savings Program in §10123 (now the School Decarbonization Program), allowing the Trust to facilitate access to and cost-share a variety of "professional services" (beyond "energy audits"), that will assist schools in navigating the often-complex energy project management landscape. We envision that this could lead to development of cost-effective, lower carbon heating systems, building envelope improvements, as well as distributed energy projects like solar.

The Trust is confident that this change will provide meaningful help to Maine schools in their pursuit of carbon neutrality.

Respectfully,

/s/MDS

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