

May 12, 2021

Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
c/o Office of Fiscal and Program Review
5 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: Support of LD 1682, An Act to Require Consideration of Climate and Equity Impacts by the Public Utilities Commission

Dear Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and other distinguished members of the Committee,

My name is Steve Clemmer, Director of Energy Research and Analysis in the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) Climate and Energy Program. I offer this testimony in support of LD 1682 on behalf of UCS.

UCS puts rigorous, independent science to work to solve our planet's most pressing problems. Joining with people across the country, we combine technical analysis and effective advocacy to create innovative, practical solutions for a healthy, safe, and sustainable future. UCS has more than a half a million supporters nationally, including more than 2,500 in Maine.

Here are 4 key reasons why UCS supports LD 1682:

LD 1682 can help ensure that the electricity sector plays a key role in achieving Maine's emission reduction and clean energy targets.

The Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is critical to the success of Maine's climate and economic action plan, yet under current law the PUC is not required to consider climate change, or equity and environmental justice in its decision making. In addition to its statutory obligation to ensure utilities provide safe, reliable, and affordable electricity, the PUC has an essential role to play to ensure that the grid is planned, built and operated in a way that achieves deep cuts in emissions and reduces pollution, public health impacts, and energy burdens in disadvantaged and low-income communities.

The electricity sector is the linchpin of economy-wide deep decarbonization. While Maine's electricity sector already has relatively low emissions compared with other sectors, increased electrification of cars, trucks, home heating, buildings and industrial processes with low or zero carbon power is key to reducing emissions from fossil fuels in those sectors. Modeling conducted by Synapse Energy Economics for the Maine Climate Action plan showed that greater deployment of these solutions could more than double electricity demand in Maine

between 2020 and 2050.¹ They also found that a significant increase in wind and solar, energy storage, transmission, and other electricity infrastructure would be needed to meet this increase in demand. LD 1682 would help ensure that PUC decisions and utility planning include a more complete evaluation of the costs and benefits of these solutions.

LD 1682 will help Maine plan for future climate impacts on the electricity system.

Even if Maine achieves deep cuts in heat trapping emissions, it will still need to adapt to and prepare for future climate impacts. UCS studies show that projected increases in extreme heat and drought as well as flooding from sea-level rise, storm surge, and extreme precipitation events will have adverse effects on electricity reliability and result in increased outages that are costly for Maine households and businesses.² While additional hardening of the grid will be necessary, it can also be expensive. Win-win solutions such as solar plus storage, clean energy microgrids, and greater demand-side flexibility will also be needed to make the grid more resilient to climate change while reducing emissions and lowering the costs of power outages.³ LD 1682 would allow the PUC to consider a broader range of costs and benefits in decisions to implement these strategies while making the grid more resilient to climate change.

LD 1682 can help reduce pollution and energy burdens in disadvantaged communities.

By prioritizing equity in PUC decision-making, LD 1682 could help reduce pollution and related public health impacts that are often disproportionately experienced by disadvantaged communities. It could also help reduce energy burdens by prioritizing investments in energy efficiency, weatherization, and clean energy solutions that result in significantly lower energy bills and more comfortable, higher quality housing for low-income and rural households. In addition, it can help ensure that PUC decisions around electricity infrastructure investments increase resilience to climate change impacts in disadvantaged communities.

Direct engagement with disadvantaged and low-income communities is needed when making electricity infrastructure decisions and designing policies and utility programs to ensure all communities benefit from the transition to a clean energy economy. The equity assessment completed for the Maine climate action plan’s recommendation to initiate a power sector transformation stakeholder process highlighted this need:

“...an inclusive and representative stakeholder engagement process is essential to ensuring that the economic benefits of Maine’s power sector transition are equitably distributed across income levels. Engaging low-income stakeholders from the beginning of the process can potentially have a positive impact on the overall equity of the power transformation process and is highly recommended as a strategy to promote procedural equity and inclusion.”⁴

¹ Synapse Energy Economics. 2020. Volume 3 Mitigation Modeling: Consolidated Energy Sectors Modeling Results. Online at: https://climatecouncil.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/ERG_MCC_Vol3_MaineEmissionsAnalysisSynapse_11-9-2020.pdf

² Davis, M. and S. Clemmer. 2014. Power Failure: How Climate Change Puts our Electricity at Risk—and What We Can Do. Union of Concerned Scientists. Online at: <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/Power-Failure-How-Climate-Change-Puts-Our-Electricity-at-Risk-and-What-We-Can-Do.pdf>.

³ McNamara, J., S. Clemmer, K. Dahl, and E. Spanger-Siegfried. 2015. Lights Out: Storm Surge, Blackouts, and How Clean Energy Can Help. Union of Concerned Scientists. Online at: <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/10/lights-out-full-report.pdf>

⁴ University of Maine, Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions. Assessing the Potential Equity Outcomes of Maine’s Climate Action Plan: Framework, Analysis and Recommendations. Online at: https://climatecouncil.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/MCC_EquityAssessmentReport_201007.pdf

We would recommend coordinating closely with the Maine Climate Council Equity Subcommittee to get input on how to best increase engagement with disadvantaged communities and integrate equity into the PUC's decision-making framework.

LD 1682 is supported by a wide range of stakeholders.

LD 1682 is strongly supported by the Maine Environmental Priorities Coalition, which represents 32 organizations (including UCS). I also represented UCS in the Maine Utility/Regulatory Reform and Decarbonization Initiative (MURRDI), a multi-stakeholder process that included 25 different organizations and was co-convened by the Great Plains Institute and The Nature Conservancy.⁵ One of the group's desired outcomes from this process was to plan, build and operate the electric grid "to address both utility and consumer needs related to greenhouse gas emissions requirements, equity and environmental justice, safety, reliability, resiliency, and other quantifiable benefits."

To help achieve this outcome, one of the nine recommendations in the MURRDI report was to expand the PUC's design-making framework to include formal consideration of climate, equity, and environmental justice issues. LD 1682 is also important for implementing other recommendations in the report, such as establishing a more holistic grid planning process, advancing new EV fast charger deployment, increasing load flexibility, and exploring transmission development in Northern Maine.

In conclusion, LD 1682 would help achieve Maine's emission reduction targets and climate action plan recommendations by enabling the PUC to account for climate change, equity, and environmental justice issues in its decision-making, while ensuring a more equitable and just transition to a clean energy economy. For these reasons, UCS strongly supports LD 1682. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions.

⁵ Maine Utility/Regulatory Reform and Decarbonization Initiative. April 2021. <https://www.betterenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/MURRDI-Stakeholder-Process-Summary.pdf>