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Testimony of Representative Victoria Doudera on LD 1682, "An Act To Require Consideration of Climate and Equity Impacts by the Public Utilities Commission"

May 12, 2021

Greetings Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee. I am Vicki Doudera, and I represent House District 94, the towns of Camden, Islesboro and Rockport. I am here today to present **LD 1682, "An Act To Require Consideration of Climate and Equity Impacts by the Public Utilities Commission."**

When three-time Super Bowl champion and former Dallas Cowboy Emmitt James Smith III was inducted to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2010, he thanked one of his high school coaches for a piece of advice that proved pivotal to his success. The league's all-time rusher was told: *It's only a dream until you write it down, and then it becomes a goal.* Here in Maine we have a critically important set of goals, published five months ago, a plan that has the potential to help us address what may be the most pressing long-term problem our state has ever faced: preparing for and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Maine Won't Wait, the four-year climate action plan from the Maine Climate Council, took the dreams of scientists, industry leaders, elected officials, and engaged citizens, and synthesized them into a set of written goals to reduce carbon emissions and achieve carbon neutrality in Maine by 2045. The report also stipulates that future climate actions are to have a focus on protecting and supporting vulnerable communities who are most at-risk from climate disruption.

Now the time has come to take the goals in that plan and run with them by making them priorities. And a critical way to do that is by empowering our state agencies to emphasize

climate and equity impacts, to hold these considerations in the same regard as others, such as cost and adequate service.

LD 1682 gets the ball rolling by focusing on the Public Utilities Commission, an agency whose future decisions are critical to achieving the goals in our climate action plan. As the regulator of 430 electric, gas, telephone and water utilities and districts in our state, the PUC is uniquely positioned to help us advance climate and equity impacts.

As members of this committee well know, the PUC is tasked with three regulatory priorities: ensuring safe, reasonable and adequate service; assisting in minimizing the cost of energy available to the State's consumers; and ensuring that the rates of public utilities subject to rate regulation are just and reasonable. LD 1682 adds two additional concerns – reducing greenhouse gas emissions to meet the reduction goals already in statute; and addressing and mitigating disproportionate energy burdens on environmental justice populations, frontline communities and utility customers who are underserved by policies, programs and systems due to geography, race, income or other socioeconomic factors.

“Time out,” you might be saying. Doesn't the PUC already take climate and social justice considerations into account? The answer is *yes*. There are certainly instances in which our current PUC has factored in these issues, but that might not always be the case in the future. Unless the PUC is *charged* with considering climate and equity -- unless it has the authority to do so -- it does not need to do so, and we cannot be sure these critically important considerations will continue to occur.

LD 1682 includes definitions for the terms environmental justice, environmental justice populations and front line communities. I recognize that this language may require more input from key players. I look forward to working with the co-chairs of the Climate Council's Equity Subcommittee and other stakeholders to get these definitions right.

Speaking of stakeholders, I thank the Environmental Priorities Coalition for designating LD 1682 as a priority bill, and appreciate the many thoughtful hours these organizations have dedicated. A special thank you to the Acadia Center, located in my District. Jeff Marks and Dan Sosland came to me with the idea for this important legislation and have been my MVPs.

It's only a dream until you write it down, and then it becomes a goal. A goal is an objective that we work toward with effort and determination. But a priority is what rises to the top of the playbook. LD 1682 enables one of our most important state agencies to prioritize climate and equity, to put them front and center, so that Maine can score points against a formidable foe: climate change.