



Testimony of the Environmental Priorities Coalition
In Support of LD 1682
**An Act To Require Consideration of Climate and Equity Impacts
by the Public Utilities Commission**
Before the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee
May 12, 2021

Good morning Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee.

My name is Kathleen Meil, Director of Policy and Partnerships for Maine Conservation Alliance, and I offer testimony today on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC). The EPC is a partnership of thirty-two conservation, environmental, and public health organizations that unify around a common agenda every year. The EPC represents more than 120,000 members in Maine who want to protect the good health, good jobs, and quality of life that depend upon a healthy environment. LD 1682 is priority legislation for our coalition for 2021.

Put simply, **LD 1682 is the ACTION called for in Maine's Climate Action Plan.** By specifically adding climate and equity to the responsibilities of the Public Utilities Commission, LD 1682 would empower the Commission to make policy, programmatic, and regulatory decisions that reflect our climate, health, and equity priorities. These decisions have the potential to advance an equitable low-carbon future, in line with Maine's Climate Action Plan and climate law, yet the Commission is not empowered to center climate action and equity in its work.

The Public Utilities Commission needs the tools to implement Maine's new Climate Action Plan. The Climate Action Plan (CAP) represents the state's most significant and comprehensive effort to reduce climate pollution and create new jobs as part of the transition to a clean energy economy. It sets out strategies based on both scientific assessments of the emissions reduction levels needed to help guard our economy, people, and environment from severe impacts of climate change, and on equity assessments of policy impacts. As the regulator of investor-owned utilities, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has unique authority to advance climate and equity priorities and is critical to the success of the CAP.

Current law requires the PUC to keep utility rates low, ensure reliable supply, and allow utilities the opportunity to earn a profit on their business. If the clean energy investments contemplated in the CAP would increase rates or cut profits, the PUC may be required to reject them – regardless of how many benefits they would deliver for Mainers.

Reforming enabling statutes would allow regulators to consider the full costs and benefits of energy investments and make decisions that appropriately value reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing public health, creating jobs, and mitigating disproportionate energy burdens on overburdened and underserved communities.

Adding climate and equity requirements to the PUC's mandate would help minimize the long-term costs of climate change and other impacts that now fall outside the scope of the PUC's primary responsibility to keep the cost of energy low. Instead of choosing the cheapest solution in the moment, the PUC can be empowered to choose the best solution for both today and tomorrow's ratepayers.

Our commitment to climate action and environmental justice led Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition to identify LD 1682 as priority legislation for 2021. On behalf of all thirty-two EPC partner organizations and our many thousands of members and supporters, I urge you to vote ought to pass. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to you and I am happy to answer any questions.