



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology

From: Patricia Rubert-Nason, Sierra Club Maine

Date: May 10, 2021

Re: Testimony in Support of L.D. 1682 **An Act To Require Consideration of Climate and Equity Impacts by the Public Utilities Commission**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and Members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology. I am Patricia Rubert-Nason, and I write on behalf of Sierra Club Maine's over 20,000 members and supporters. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we move to demand bold, equitable solutions to the climate crisis.

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is the regulatory body for public utilities in Maine. As it stands, the purpose of the PUC, as defined in statute is "ensure safe, reasonable and adequate service, to assist in minimizing the cost of energy available to the State's consumers and to ensure that the rates of public utilities subject to rate regulation are just and reasonable to customers and public utilities."¹ LD 1682 would add to the PUC responsibilities to "reduce greenhouse gas emissions" and "to address and mitigate disproportionate energy burdens on environmental justice populations, frontline communities and utility customers who are underserved by utility or electricity policies, programs and systems."²

The climate crisis is an urgent problem that requires bold, intersectional solutions. We need to eliminate anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. LD 1682 provides a critical reform to the PUC's charge, which will make it more responsive to the state's climate needs and goals, while focusing on the disproportionate energy burden placed on underserved and marginalized communities, such as communities of color, low-income Mainers and parts of rural Maine.

Utilities play a critical role in decarbonizing our economy. In order for us to meet our climate goals we must both rapidly decarbonize the electricity system and expand the supply of electricity to meet increasing demand from beneficial electrification. As the regulatory body for the utilities, the decisions of the PUC will play a key role in

¹ <https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/35-A/title35-Asec101.html>

² <http://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP1251&item=1&snum=130>

determining whether or not we meet our climate goals. By “prioritiz[ing] proceedings and activities that advance decarbonization in the utility sector,” this bill authorizes the PUC to react to the current climate and clean energy needs and creates much needed direct authority.

In addition to the critical need to decarbonize our economy, there is also a critical need to address both existing inequities in utility service and the risk of disproportionate burdens falling on particular communities as a result of the transition. LD 1682 would require the PUC to “address and mitigate” disproportionate energy burdens on underserved and disadvantaged communities. During the rulemaking process, the details of ‘how’ will be sorted out. Including this language is critical to a just and sustainable transition to a fossil fuel free economy.

The caveat in the bill, “when possible,” should allay any opponents’ concerns about whether cost and reliability will remain prominent in the PUC’s decision-making. The bill’s language gives the PUC Commissioners the legal basis to take into account the unequal energy burdens of Mainers and the necessity of achieving the state’s climate goals.

We think this language should be included for all departments and agencies, but for now, changing the PUC’s charge will result in consequential climate and justice action.

We urge Ought to Pass for L.D. 1682.

Sincerely,

Patricia Rubert-Nason
Legislative Team
Sierra Club Maine