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May 11, 2021

Testimony of Representative Melanie Sachs, co-sponsor of LD 1659, “An Act to Create the Maine Clean Energy and Sustainability Accelerator” before the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and the esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology:

My name is Melanie Sachs, and I am honored to represent House District 48, which includes Freeport and part of Pownal. I am before you today as a co-sponsor and strong supporter of LD 1659. You will hear many data-driven arguments that indicate the urgency and feasibility of establishing the Maine Clean Energy and Sustainability Accelerator. From reducing barriers by lowering the upfront cost of capital, to streamlined access to federal funding, to alignment with current state climate and economic development strategies- the need for this investment vehicle is clear.

In my testimony today, I want to highlight why this bill is so important to each and every one of your districts on a more personal level. As a former Freeport Town Council Chair, and as the former executive director of nonprofit community support agency helping residents with basic needs, I worked to find ways to provide access to energy savings and energy efficiency tools to those with lower incomes. We offered weatherization programs, organized energy fairs and services with Efficiency Maine, and helped with electricity bills. We initiated a program called Solarize Freeport, which brought together groups of interested residents to purchase solar arrays at a lower cost through bundling of resources. We developed plans around sea level rise mitigation, but have not yet made substantial investments in mitigation infrastructure.

Establishing a Maine Clean Energy Accelerator would be a game changer for municipalities of all sizes in this state, including yours, by offering concrete resources and solutions. For example, so many times, as we found in Freeport, only a few residents at a time could take advantage of any given program. The accelerator model expands those opportunities exponentially through access to financing tools currently not feasible for many residents. As one [article](#) noted “A sustainability accelerator could help ensure an equitable energy transition by reducing barriers for lower-income residents and small businesses to finance weatherization, heating system conversions and renewable power generation.” This is further codified in the bill in Section 6,

where it says the accelerator “shall ensure that 40% of its investment activity is directed to serve vulnerable communities.” This promotes targeted investment and access to these resources on a scale much larger than we could provide as a single municipality, and to provide investment in vulnerable communities.

As communities up and down our 3,500 miles of coastline look to bolster infrastructure against increasing climate disruptions, they will also need access to substantial financial resources. Those resources, particularly for physical infrastructure, are not currently widely available. I have included a link in my testimony to the [November 2020 report](#) “Assessing the Impacts Climate Change May Have on the State’s Economy, Revenues, and Investment Decisions: Volume 4: Economic Analyses of Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies” by the Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, which lays out in great detail the substantial return on investment for infrastructure initiatives, and the cost to municipalities and our state of doing nothing. Again, access to low-cost capital will be necessary to make these improvements, with the report noting that every dollar spent on hazard mitigation saves roughly six dollars in avoided costs.

Section 5 of the bill outlines the “Zero-emissions fleet and related infrastructure financing program” which is another key element for municipalities and communities. It states that “The accelerator shall explore the establishment of a program to provide low-interest and zero interest loans, up to 30 years in length, to any school, municipal planning organization or nonprofit organization seeking financing for the acquisition of zero greenhouse gas emissions vehicle fleets or associated infrastructure to support zero greenhouse gas emissions vehicle fleets.” As the Transportation Working Group of the Maine Climate Council [noted](#) “Transportation is responsible for **54 percent** of Maine's greenhouse gas emissions -- the most of any sector.” Those local entities who wish to convert to electric vehicles for cost savings and environmental concerns would now have a vehicle (every pun intended) to do so easily.

And finally [another report noted](#) that “Accelerator loans would fuel job growth and represent a sizable return on investment”. The legislation before you ensures in Section 6 that those jobs will pay equitable wages, and again aligns with state economic recovery goals.

Ensuring Equity. Promoting Job Growth. Bolstering Local Infrastructure. Supporting Communities. As one of my constituents noted “It's the best way to mainstream this change that we need to make.” I urge you to support LD 1659 for your community, and for the state of Maine.