



Testimony before the

Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

By Rob Wood, Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy

May 12, 2021

Re: LD 1682 – An Act To Require Consideration of Climate and Equity Impacts by the Public Utilities Commission

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Rob Wood and I am the Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify **in support of LD 1682**, An Act To Require Consideration of Climate and Equity Impacts by the Public Utilities Commission.

The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. We have been working in Maine for more than 60 years with a focus on protecting land, restoring rivers and streams, rebuilding groundfish populations in the Gulf of Maine and developing innovative solutions to address climate change.

The Nature Conservancy's support for this bill is straightforward. There are myriad facets of utility regulation and Public Utilities Commission decision-making that affect the State's ability to meet its greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. The nexus between utility regulation and Maine's climate goals will only grow over time, alongside the growing need for grid investments and innovation to accommodate new clean energy resources, battery storage, and electric heating and transportation. At the same time, new energy infrastructure and new energy policies can impact and benefit communities in disproportionate ways, creating the potential for unjust outcomes as Maine transitions to a low-carbon economy.

In recognition of these important realities, LD 1682 incorporates both climate change and equity and environmental justice into the foundational purpose of the PUC. While many of the Commission's actions are bound by other statutes, this change will ensure that where the PUC does have discretion, it will consider critical climate and equity goals alongside the traditional goals of safe, reasonable and adequate service and just and reasonable rates.

It is also worth noting that this approach was supported, at a high level, by a wide-ranging group of organizations and individuals who participated in a grid modernization stakeholder group recently

convened by The Nature Conservancy in Maine and the Great Plains Institute, the Maine Utility/Regulatory Reform and Decarbonization Initiative.¹ This stakeholder group recommended that climate requirements, equity implications and impacts on environmental justice communities should be incorporated into the PUC's decision-making framework in order to enable consideration of the full costs and benefits of energy investments in all PUC decisions.

TNC's only suggestion for LD 1682 is that the definitions of "environmental justice," "environmental justice population," and "frontline communities" should be reviewed by the Equity Subcommittee of the Maine Climate Council before they are finalized. This Subcommittee is developing equity outcomes for Maine's Climate Action Plan and is well-positioned to provide guidance on the most appropriate way to define these terms.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ "Maine Utility/Regulatory Reform and Decarbonization Initiative," The Nature Conservancy in Maine and the Great Plains Institute (April 2021), <https://www.betterenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/MURRDI-Stakeholder-Process-Summary.pdf>.