



Testimony in Support of LD 1549: “An Act to Direct the Public Utilities Commission to Seek Informational Bids Regarding Small Modular Nuclear Reactors in the State”

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Nick Murray and I serve as director of policy for Maine Policy Institute. We are a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 1549.

Maine lawmakers have identified climate change as a necessary problem to tackle, and in response have sought to shift the state’s energy portfolio to include more “clean” sources of energy such as wind and solar. However, the state’s energy production has grown ever more expensive over the last two decades, leaving consumers and businesses desperate for relief. In 2023 alone, costs to CMP residential customers are expected to rise by roughly 26 percent.¹

While there is some acknowledgment in Augusta of growing energy expenses, the governor and lawmakers have done very little beyond attempting to alleviate short-term financial stress by providing temporary relief in the way of rebate checks to Maine residents.²

The reason Maine has such high energy costs is primarily a supply issue. Maine currently generates less electricity than all but five other states, increasing pressure on prices.³ Making matters worse, the energy we do produce is of a particularly expensive and volatile type due to the deliberate choices Maine has made to emphasize expensive and unreliable renewable energy sources.

If Maine is going to pursue clean—and reliable—energy alternatives to fossil fuels, it needs to consider trying to cultivate nuclear power in Maine once more. Decommissioning nuclear power plants has not aided New England state governments in their oft-publicized searches for cleaner energy sources. A March 2017 presentation by ISO-NE to the Consumer Liaison Group noted that, in 2015 after the Vermont

¹ <https://www.pressherald.com/2022/11/16/power-supply-rates-for-most-cmp-customers-to-rise-again-in-2023/>

² <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/01/04/politics/450-maine-legislature-heating-aid-deal>

³ <https://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=ME>

Yankee plant closed, carbon emissions actually rose, during a time when overall emissions had been falling.⁴

Small Modular Reactor (SMR) technology is an exciting new development in this space, classified as having capacity between 50 MW and 300 MW, about one-third that of traditional reactors.

Given that Maine uses about 970,000 megawatt-hours (MWh) of electricity in a typical month,⁵ between five and 20 SMRs could power the whole state, reliably producing baseload power, with zero carbon emissions.

We commend the sponsors for bringing this forward-thinking piece of legislation to require annual reports from the PUC on the feasibility of establishing SMR nuclear power generation in Maine. Frankly, the Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC) should already be investigating SMRs.

Modern nuclear technology is considerably safer and more efficient than the nuclear technology of the past. SMR technology offers the potential of quicker construction, lower costs, and improved safety over traditional nuclear reactors.

This bill is common sense, truth be told, the PUC should already be looking into SMRs, since the first one was approved by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) last year.⁶ Doing so could catapult Maine to become a leader in emission-free energy production, increasing supply and supporting lower prices for not only the state and New England, but as an example to the nation and the world.

Please deem LD 1549 “Ought To Pass” and begin to explore how this exciting new technology can positively impact Mainers’ standard of living. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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https://www.iso-ne.com/static-assets/documents/2017/03/clg_meeting_nuara_iso_update_presentation_march_02_2017.pdf (slide 8)

⁵ Electricity Data Browser | EIA.gov. “Retail sales of electricity”

⁶ <https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/nrc-certifies-first-us-small-modular-reactor-design>