

STATE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, UTILITIES, AND TECHNOLOGY

Testimony of Brianna Cunliffe

May 24th, 2023

Testimony in Support

LD 1986: An Act Relating to Net Energy Billing and Distributed Solar and Energy Storage Systems.

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and honorable members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee. My name is Brianna Cunliffe, and I am an Island Institute Fellow on Mount Desert Island with A Climate to Thrive (testifying on my own behalf). Through my community-centered work on energy justice and as a young person who has already lived through climate impacts from worsening storms, I am deeply concerned with how Maine's policy on solar rates will impact our work toward a just transition. I strongly support **LD 1986, An Act Relating to Net Energy Billing and Distributed Solar and Energy Storage Systems.**

As a Maine ratepayer, I am advocating for the innovative policy solutions contained within LD 1986, which will create a new distributed generation program for solar that is based on expert recommendations and allows Maine to leverage key federal funds. This bill offers a strategic pathway to protect ratepayers and accelerate the strategic deployment of distributed energy resources in Maine, aligned with The Maine Climate Council and Maine legislature's ambitious clean energy goals.

This stands in sharp contrast to the OPA's amendment in LD 1347, which will be reviewed by this Committee during a working session tomorrow. LD 1347 would effectively repeal critical aspects of net-energy billing in the name of distorted figures which blame net-energy billing instead of natural gas for skyrocketing electricity prices. This repeal would make solar ownership inaccessible for most low and moderate-income households, leaving Mainers unable to access the significant federal funding for solar allocated by the Inflation Reduction Act. In effect, it will prioritize wealthy individuals and entities that can afford to purchase distributed generation projects outright.

As a renter and a young person whose income remains low, my only pathway to solar ownership or any benefit from the renewable energy transition is contingent on the viability of the community-benefitting solar projects that LD 1347 would make next to impossible. In light of this, I urge the legislature to adopt this bill, LD 1986, which provides a pathway to advance Maine's climate action goals (which will protect the most vulnerable among us) while protecting low-income ratepayers.

LD 1986 applies the expertise of diverse stakeholders and proposes a framework that will protect the viability of solar ownership for low and moderate-income households. If LD 1347 were to pass instead, members of our low and moderate-income communities would not be protected—their ability to access the benefits of solar ownership would only suffer.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the people of Maine.

Sincerely,

Brianna Cunliffe