



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ENERGY, UTILITIES AND TECHNOLOGY (EUT) COMMITTEE

LD 2077 An Act Regarding Customer Costs and the Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas

-IN OPPOSITION-

January 24, 2024

The Maine Association of Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors (Maine PHCC) is comprised of 30 plumbing and heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC) contractors across the state, employing hundreds of professionals committed to providing energy efficient and cost-effective home comfort solutions for the health and safety of Maine homeowners and building occupants. We have been the voice of the plumbing and HVAC contractor community in Maine for over 130 years.

Maine PHCC opposes LD 2077 and is equally concerned about policy trends in Maine and across the country that seek to disconnect or prohibit natural gas utilities and appliances from the built environment without due consideration of the environmental and economic impacts such policies risk. This is not to say we do not recognize the need to reduce carbon emissions in the built environment, nor do we oppose building electrification; our workforce commands the skillset to perform installation, service and repair of heat pump and geothermal HVAC and plumbing appliances to the extent the market demands it and when those products are suitable for customer needs.

Regarding Sections 1-5 of the legislative text, prohibiting the expansion of gas service lines and making it cost-prohibitive to convert buildings to natural gas or to maintain gas systems risks hindering the state's climate goals by limiting the choice Mainers have in how they heat their dwellings. For example, a homeowner seeking a cost-effective and energy efficient alternative to heating oil or propane will not have the option of connecting to natural gas, meaning their only choices are to either retain their current systems or convert to electric heat pump systems. The costs associated with such a conversion can be expensive: heat pump systems incur higher up-front costs and require building envelope reinforcements such as windows, insulation, and roofing to ensure heat pumps run at peak efficiency. Older homes powered by gas or delivered fuels will likely need an electric panel upgrade to ensure the requisite amount of electricity to power the heat pump appliances replacing the older systems. Electricity usage will also increase, resulting in higher electric bills. When confronted with these costs, and without the option of a subsidized gas connection homeowners will likely retain the heating oil or propane systems on which they have relied.

Furthermore, the Committee would be remiss not to include language in the Public Utilities Commission inquiry under Section 7 requiring a summary of the costs incurred by consumers when they are left with

little choice but to electrify their dwellings when natural gas utilities and delivered fuels are no longer an option. Such inquiry should seek data including but not limited to costs of acquisition, installation and service of various types of heat pump systems versus those powered by gas or liquid fuels; electricity usage and utility costs borne by ratepayers that convert their dwellings to all-electric versus those who retain their gas or liquid fuel systems; costs of building upgrades to accommodate all-electric appliances and the ability of low- to moderate-income households to absorb those costs; and the ability of the power grid to meet increased demand for building electricity. This should provide a clearer picture of the economic costs of the policy goal that is building electrification.

Maine PHCC nonetheless avails itself as a resource to legislators and other interested parties. Plumbing and HVAC contractors are tasked with performing the labor required to bring the built environment in alignment with Maine's climate goals, and more importantly are the intersection between Maine's climate policies and the customers that will be impacted by them. Thank you for your consideration.

Faithfully submitted,

Tyler Robinson
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Alice Ames
Maine PHCC
LD 2077

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept the attached testimony on behalf of the Maine Association of Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors (Maine PHCC) and its president Tyler Robinson, in opposition to LD2077. Thank you for your consideration.