

Testimony of Nate Cloutier

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
January 23, 2024

In Opposition to LD 2077, *"An Act Regarding Customer Costs and the Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas"*

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology: My name is Nate Cloutier, and I am submitting comment on behalf of HospitalityMaine representing more than 1,300 restaurant and lodging establishments of all sizes across the state. HospitalityMaine opposes LD 2077, *"An Act Regarding Customer Costs and the Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas"*.

This legislation would take valuable energy options away from Maine residents and businesses by removing a key source of energy in Maine's portfolio. The reality is that we are in the position of still needing to rely on the energy sources of yesterday while working to procure the cleaner forms of energy of tomorrow. However, as this bill is written, it could jeopardize the availability of one of the most accessible forms of energy in the state, natural gas.

We understand this legislation would allow for incumbent natural gas companies to maintain their footprint in current territories, however, we cannot support denying this energy source as an option for our members who do not have access to natural gas currently but may in the future. Supply and demand tell us limiting energy options for businesses, especially in rural areas, would likely result in higher prices and accessibility issues.

Geothermal heat pumps and electric boilers have their place in the market, however they are not economically viable alternatives to meet the demand that many of our members need. Maine residents and businesses will have to continue to rely on natural gas to ensure that there is a viable source of energy regardless of energy transition plans.

This legislation is appropriately forward thinking but is 10-15 years ahead of its time. Energy transition will no doubt be a burden to ratepayers, and we need to ensure accessibility and affordability remain top priorities throughout any changes.

We urge you to please vote LD 2077 ought not to pass. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.