

Date: January 23, 2024

To: Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee

From: Cole Cochrane, Maine Youth Action

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 2077, An Act Regarding Customer Costs and Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas



Senator Lawrence, Representative Ziegler and the honorable members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee: My name is Cole Cochrane, I am the Policy Director at Maine Youth Action, an organization that represents hundreds of young Mainers from across the state with various backgrounds. I am also currently a freshman in college. Today I am here to testify in support of LD 2077, An Act Regarding Customer Costs and Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas.

I want to first sincerely thank Mr. Harwood and the Office of the Public Advocate for pushing forward this ambitious yet necessary piece of legislation. I understand to take a step like this requires a lot of courage and thorough review so I hope as a voice for our youth, our testimony is able to motivate you to continue advocating for our binding climate goals. With respect to the committee, I hope our organization's testimony may provide some gravity to the situation we face and how it will continue to exacerbate if we do not pass LD 2077. Sometimes when we face a transformative and high-level decision, such as the bill in front of us today, we forget the very real impact it has on many generations to come.

First and foremost, we all know what role natural gas, and more broadly fossil fuels, has in our future energy system: they will inevitably become a minute and insignificant portion of our energy supply. The reasons for this trajectory are quite plain- fossil fuels are a detriment to public health and climate, becoming increasingly unaffordable and threaten our livelihoods and existence. My generation in particular knows this all too well. We are impacted by toxic air pollutants from natural gas, leaving us vulnerable to respiratory disorders and asthma. Additionally, we are now witnessing an annual 8.7 million deaths globally from air pollution caused by fossil fuel production according to

the Harvard School of Public Health. If we do not consider negative health impacts on our youth to be of significance, instead consider how the continuance of fossil fuel production affects our livelihoods: after all, critical natural resource industries across Maine are under attack from a rapidly changing climate. Living on the coast, I personally know our commercial fishing industry is at risk- that is \$637 million and 30,000 Mainers. Additionally, having grandparents own a small farm in Parkman, they too stress how climate change is stripping them of their livelihoods and for future farmers as well. As my generation becomes the bulk of the workforce, our livelihoods will be burdened with volatility, instability and uncertainty because of fossil fuel production. Overall, we are confronted with worsening health and dwindling prosperity.

This is what LD 2077 addresses. By prohibiting the expansion of natural gas and cost recovery for new service mains and lines, this will give us the necessary time to thoroughly study and review the role of natural gas in our increasingly greener and cleaner future. Ultimately, our state is bound to reduce our GHG emissions, a responsibility that all branches of government must bear in mind when we make policy choices. Additionally, we have an implicit obligation as a state to guarantee future generations a brighter future. LD 2077 is a part of our brighter future, for it is systemically transformative and meritorious. For the reasons elaborated in this testimony, Maine Youth Action urges the committee to vote “ought to pass” on LD 2077.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cole Cochrane