

Scott Vlaun
Center for an Ecology-Based Economy
LD 32

Testimony of Scott Vlaun, Center for an Ecology-Based Economy, in Opposition to:
LD 32: An Act to Repeal the Laws Regarding Net Energy Billing and
LD 257: An Act to Eliminate the Practice of Net Energy Billing

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and esteemed members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee,

As is clear from recent events, the climate crisis is bearing down upon Maine and the entire planet. Building grid resiliency while reducing greenhouse gas emissions is essential for our future. Well-conceived net energy billing policy is imperative for Maine to meet our share of these critical goals, and reduce energy burdens on vulnerable Mainers.

As the Executive Director of the Center for an Ecology-Based Economy (CEBE) in Norway, and the president of the board of the Maine Community Power Cooperative, I thank you for providing me with this opportunity to testify regarding LD 32: An Act to Repeal the Laws Regarding Net Energy Billing and LD 257: An Act to Eliminate the Practice of Net Energy Billing.

Both of these bills would move Maine in the wrong direction at a time when we need to be redoubling our efforts to transition our grid to clean renewable energy and reduce energy costs. Opposition to these ill-conceived bills is not abstract for us. If passed these bills will undo immense amounts of hard work by our staff, board, and volunteers, as well as countless others, to build equitable access to clean energy.

For over seven years, CEBE has been working to bring the myriad benefits of clean solar energy to the people of Maine, especially to those without the location or financial capital to install their own solar. Finally, last year, with the award of over five million dollars in federal and state funding, (much of which is now in jeopardy of “clawback.”) we incorporated and launched Maine Community Power Cooperative to bring affordable solar power to hundreds, and eventually thousands of Maine households, the majority of whom will be experiencing low incomes. Installation of our first projects is slated for spring of 2025.

Our innovative consumer-owned model, utilizing state-of-the-art dual-axis solar tracker technology, was selected by the U.S. Department of Energy as one of 19 funded projects from a pool of over 650 applications and was the only project selected in the entire northeast U.S as part of DOE’s “Energy Improvements in Rural and Remote Areas” program.

Maine Community Power Cooperative will reduce and stabilize energy costs for consumers; provide valuable lease income to farmers and other landowners; enhance rather than denigrate valuable farmland; trial various agrivoltaic models; put dozens of Mainers to work with good jobs; and provide education and training for the energy jobs of the future through agreements with our local tech school, UMaine, and other workforce training programs.

Furthermore, unlike large commercial projects that we are familiar with, our network of small-scale projects of just under 200 kW DC will utilize existing space on single phase power lines, involve simple level two interconnections without expensive grid upgrades, and provide power to the local grid during peak demand periods, helping to stabilize grid reliability while reducing the need for additional fossil fuel-fired power plants. We have already identified over a thousand suitable sites and have interconnection agreements in place for our first four. Many more sites are under development.

Without Net Energy Billing, this project will come to a halt, workers will be laid off, and the dream of affordable clean energy will end for current and future member/owners. We urge you to vote ‘ought not to pass’ on these poorly conceived

and destructive bills, and work to protect net-energy billing for community-driven renewable energy initiatives such as Maine Community Power Cooperative.

Thank You,

Scott Vlaun,

Executive Director, Center for an Ecology-Based Economy

Board President, Maine Community Power Cooperative