



Testimony of Steve Perry on LD 1231

“An Act Concerning Climate and Community Investment Projects.”

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Steve Perry. I am a resident of Lincoln and here today as an employee-owner of Sargent Corporation. I am here today to testify in opposition to this bill.

Sargent Corporation's 350+ employees work in seven states and are led by a field management team boasting over 1,000 years of combined experience. The company was founded in 1926, nearly one hundred years working here in Maine. In 2013 Sargent became 100% employee-owned, a milestone for all of my fellow owners.

My history with Sargent is relative to this bill. My career started with Sargent one day after I completed my degree at UMaine. Like so many in my field, I've enjoyed working with a company that values my career progression and views personal success as a win for everyone working here. Today my role is business development, and that includes renewable energy work. I bring this up today because the bill or notion that a non-union pathway is detrimental to the employee isn't actual.

Sargent has built many renewable projects throughout the Northeast, including solar, hydropower, and wind. We continue to expand our services in the market and believe that Maine's energy independence is critical to our state's growth. We've advocated for increased investment in renewables and building a clean energy economy.

Sargent is invested in the safety and education of the employee-owners. Our experience modification rating, the calculation used to price worker's compensation insurance, is at .57, and as you probably know, any company with an average safety record is rated at 1.0, meaning anything below exceeds the industry average.

Adopting a safety culture is more than being competitive. It knows your company values the health and well-being of the entire team. One of our successes is the continued investment in Sargent Academy. Maine residents interested in heavy construction can attend our private academy and learn the trade with classroom and hands-on instruction in the field. From the beginning, they are Sargent employees. Education and continuous learning don't end after the academy. We continue to build the skillsets providing every new hire our safety and company orientation. In the field, we conduct weekly safety inspections, and under a new initiative, we have a goal of providing one safety inspector for every seven employees. Sargent's safety record has been nationally recognized year after year when compared to firms across the country.

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The language included in this bill for changing solar racking installation is a significant issue for solar developers. Placing this language in the bill also pre-empts agency rule-making, with experts making a decision based on union or non-union conditions. Let the “free market” decide the winners of projects and allow Maine contractors a fair chance.

Merit shop is about open competition and free enterprise, regardless of labor affiliation. Not only should the best developer win a project, that developer should be able to hire union companies or non-union companies — or even both. Again, it should be about the getting the highest-quality product and providing the lowest energy prices to the rate payers. This type of freedom is what drives us to believe that companies should be judged on their merits when they are competing for projects, rather than simply their labor affiliations.

Sargent Corporation believes that in fair and open competition, union and non-union firms can (and often do) work together to deliver safe, high-quality construction projects. Since 2005 we have been working on renewable energy projects in Maine that have both working side by side.

Right now, projects are stalled or slowed because of the lack of qualified electricians. Adding new criteria for renewable projects is shortsighted. Specialty firms that are experienced and qualified to bring value and safety to the project should be allowed to continue their craft. We are listening to investors in the renewable energy space who believe this will place the renewable energy generation cost too high if this language is adopted.

Our entire team is invested in providing the highest quality service under the renewable energy market's safest conditions. We've worked with developers and policy-makers to encourage continued growth here in Maine. Today I am asking this Committee to allow Maine's employee-owners to be invested in providing a cleaner climate for our kids and grandkids to enjoy.

Please vote against this bill.

Respectfully,

Steve Perry

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