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Rep. Scott Cuddy's Testimony in Favor of LD 1969, An Act Concerning Equity in Renewable Energy Projects and Workforce Development

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing my name is Scott Cuddy and I live in Winterport. I represent House District 98 which is comprised of Frankfort, Searsport, Swanville, and Winterport. I'm here before you today to speak in favor of LD 1969.

This bill seeks to accomplish several things. First, it looks to add labor protection to renewable energy projects by applying the prevailing wage. Second, it seeks to help address the incredible labor shortage we have by creating a legal framework for pre-apprenticeship in Maine. Third, it seeks to create a demand for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship training, the best form of training in the trades, by tying them together on these projects and giving contractors using them an incentive. Lastly, the bill adds benefits in the PUC's procurement process for bidders who use Project Labor Agreements or whose contractors are employee owned. Empowering employees is a good thing.

The bill has gone through many drafts and there is currently a sponsor's amendment. If you have not seen it, the amendment is available on the testimony portal.

I remain open to amending the bill further as ideas are presented in today's hearing. In my last round of meetings with individuals who have expressed an interest in the legislation there were several suggestions that I will likely bring you in an amendment for the work session. My goal is to improve the lives of working Mainer's who are working on these renewable energy projects that blossomed after the state passed different pieces of legislation to create the market for them. Although I believe I have compiled a set of very good ideas, I never close myself off to new ideas.

One item that has been brought to my attention is that this bill might affect certain projects that are already out to bid, but whose bid documents wouldn't contain the provisions of this bill. I will amend the bill to ensure that that doesn't happen. If a project is bid under certain rules the rules should not be changed afterward.

The section of the bill regarding the prevailing wage is fairly straightforward. Prevailing wage is well understood by the building community. It sets a wage and benefit floor for everyone bidding on a project. The basic premise of prevailing wage is that the wage set should neither be higher nor lower than the wage that prevails in the area for a specific trade.

The sections of the bill that deal with pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship are designed to open construction work up to groups that aren't often found on construction sites, as well as increase the number of people in the trades in general. There have been a number of initiatives to improve our workforce numbers, both public and private, but we still have a huge demand that we're not filling. These sections of the bill will help to move Maine people into these jobs so that the good compensation received by construction workers will stay here in Maine. Anything we can do to build the high quality workforce we need right here in Maine is a good thing.

I have worked on several solar projects here in Maine, and there have been a number of workers from Massachusetts and New Hampshire on the projects. These folks were not working for the contractors I work for, but working for out of state contractors who brought their people with them. I want Mainers to do this work, and the best way we can make that will happen is to train them up and put them out in the field. Apprenticeship is widely recognized as the best way to train for the trades and this bill acknowledges that and uses it.

Project labor agreements are something this committee has heard a fair deal about. For those unfamiliar with them, they're essentially a contract struck between the developer of a project and the building trades which describes how the project will be run. From the workers perspective they specify things like rates of pay, benefits, and working conditions. There are other conditions designed to protect the developer and contractors, too. Any entity who wants to bid on the project has access to this document and knows that they'll need to abide by it. They'll have to pay their people that rate and those benefits and abide by the working conditions laid out in the document. So long as they do that it doesn't matter if they're signatory with a union or not.

As I said earlier, the intent of this legislation is to improve the lives of working Mainers who are participating in the recent explosion of work in the renewable sector here in Maine. I remain open to ideas on how to accomplish that, but I am convinced that the bill I have put forward here moves us in the right direction. I welcome any questions the committee may have.