



Northeast Hearth, Patio, and Barbecue Association

PO Box 28, Sudbury, MA 01776 . 978-440-0344 . nehpba.org

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Submitted via: www.mainelegislature.org/testimony

RE: LD 556 - An Act to Preserve Heating and Energy Choice by Prohibiting a Municipality from Prohibiting a Particular Energy System or Energy Distributor

Dear Members of the State and Local Government Committee,

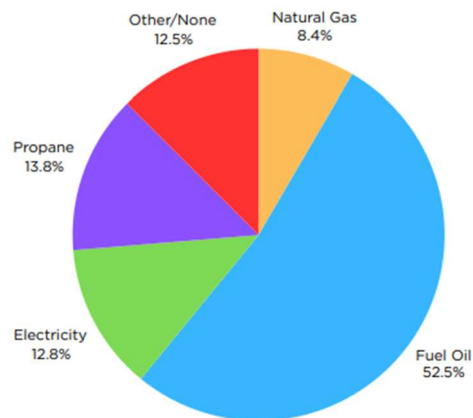
My name is Karen Arpino, and I am the Executive Director of the Northeast Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (NEHPBA). I am writing to express strong support for LD 556 (or SP 218), "An Act to Preserve Heating and Energy Choice by Prohibiting a Municipality from Prohibiting a Particular Energy System or Energy Distributor."

NEHPBA is a trade association representing more than 250 individual member hearth and fireplace retail and related companies throughout the Northeast. The vast majority of our members are independent "mom and pop" small businesses that play a significant role in the communities and markets they serve across the state of Maine.

Gas appliances, particularly fireplaces and stoves, serve as a crucial secondary heat source, especially in a cold state like Maine where winter storms can, and have, caused power outages. Without access to these options, families could be left without a dependable way to heat their homes during extreme weather events.

NEHPBA strongly urges the committee to vote unanimously Ought to Pass on this bill. We all want a cleaner environment, and consumers also want the right to choose what energy source works best for their homes and businesses. In Maine, more than 52% of homes and businesses use heating oil, almost 14% use clean propane, more than 8% use natural gas, almost 13% use electricity, and nearly 9% use another fuel source including primarily wood for heating. This bill protects the right of our citizens to decide which energy is right for them.

Types of residential heating fuel consumed in Maine (2023)



Across the country, municipalities are adopting policies that ban gas hookups in new construction, eliminating consumer choice and raising energy costs for homeowners. LD 556 would prevent such restrictive mandates in Maine, protecting both consumers and small businesses from unnecessary burdens while ensuring that affordable and reliable heating options remain available.



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Heat pumps need the most energy from the grid during the times when the grid is most stressed. When the grid is stressed, the electricity plants switch from using natural gas to diesel or heating oil to generate electricity. For example, January 19, 2025, recorded a peak hourly demand of 19,600 megawatts (MW). The grid required running older thermal generating plants that burn oil and coal. In fact, from January 20 to January 21, 2025 thermal plants that burn oil provided more electricity to the ISO-NE electricity grid than plants that burn natural gas, which is relatively uncommon. At the same time, a coal-fired plant that burns coal in the region supplied close to 300 MW to the grid from January 19 to January 25, 2025. Two other major sources of electricity in New England were steady suppliers during the cold snap. The region's three nuclear reactors steadily provided 3,350 MW of power throughout the period.¹ This is why we need alternative energy sources to heat our homes during extreme, harsh winter weeks, especially when these alternative energy sources do not put stress on our fragile electric grid.

LD 556 preserves local control over safety and health.

- By law, local building codes must follow the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code, which permits regulation of heating and energy installations based on safety. LD 556 does not remove this authority.
- By law, municipalities may regulate the placement of utility pipes or wires in the public right of way based on the safety of the traveling public. LD 556 does not remove this authority.
- LD 556 does not restrict local authority over the siting of commercial energy generating facilities.

In fact, 88% of Maine voters surveyed believe Mainers should have the right to choose how they heat their homes and businesses.²

Maine consumers need an “all of the above” approach to heating. What may look like the best, least expensive, or most versatile energy option today may not be the best solution tomorrow. Diversification of resources is critical to addressing the long-term needs of Maine residents, businesses, and government.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the State and Local Government Committee to advance this bill and keep Maine's residents warm and small businesses protected.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Karen Arpino

Executive Director
Northeast Hearth, and Patio Association

¹ www.eia.gov/todayinenergy

² Critical Insights Survey, Fall 2024