



Testimony in Support of LD 1949, An Act Regarding Energy Fairness

**To the Committee on the Energy, Utilities and Technology
by Jack Shapiro, Climate and Clean Energy Program Director
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Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee, my name is Jack Shapiro, and I am the Climate and Clean Energy Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is a nonpartisan membership organization that has been working for more than 65 years to protect, restore, and conserve Maine's environment, now and for future generations. On behalf of our nearly 20,000 members and supporters, NRCM testifies in support of LD 1949, An Act Regarding Energy Fairness.

Maine's energy plan, along with the state's climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, serves as a roadmap to shift our energy system away from expensive fossil fuels – the primary driver of high energy costs in Maine – to less-polluting sources of energy with more stable prices over the long term. LD 1949 has a number of provisions that can help make our energy system – and especially how people with low incomes interact with the system – fairer. This testimony is not comprehensive, but I hope to illustrate some of the benefits of these provisions for individuals, families, and businesses across Maine. LD 1949:

- Increases protections against disconnections, especially for the most vulnerable. This is particularly important as Mainers increasingly shift from more expensive fossil fuels for heating and transportation to more efficient electric technologies.
- Improves data collection on disconnections and non-payment. It must be assumed that most non-payments are primarily due to lack of funds by utility customers who are forced to choose between paying bills and other critical needs like food, rent, or medicine. This additional data will help policymakers and future legislators to make informed decisions balancing electric system needs, costs, and impacts on low-income Mainers.
- Includes common-sense restrictions on what utilities can bill to ratepayers versus what must be paid as a true expense. Some provisions are common sense – like disallowing meals for board members. Others help level the playing field, for example when utilities can bill ratepayers for extensive attorneys' fees and consultants when arguing for a rate case, a privilege most other participants in those cases cannot take advantage of.
- Establishes limitations on administrative charges, which could lower the cost of and speed up utility interconnection of new resources.
- Creates definitions of environmental justice and environmental justice populations. It is well established that historically marginalized and underserved communities are

disproportionately impacted by climate change and environmental degradation.¹ In Maine, the Maine Climate Council's Equity Subcommittee has provided recommendations that call for meaningful community engagement and equitable implementation of the strategies contained within Maine's Climate Action Plan. These definitions will help provide due consideration to environmental justice populations and frontline communities in decision-making at the Public Utilities Commission.

LD 1949 is a broad bill, but our energy system is intertwined with many aspects of our lives, requiring a broad set of solutions to make it fairer, as well as cleaner.

We encourage the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1949.

Thank you.

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impacts*. September 2021. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-09/climate-vulnerability_september-2021_508.pdf