Testimony of Benjamin Dudley

In opposition to L.D. 640, “Resolve, To Require a Study of Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions from the Proposed Central Maine Power Company Transmission Corridor”

Senator Carson, Representative Tucker and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, I am Benjamin Dudley, director of Mainers for Clean Energy Jobs, and I appear before you today to testify in opposition to this bill.

Mainers for Clean Energy Jobs is a coalition of workers, businesses and concerned citizens that cares deeply about the future of Maine and its residents. Our founders are the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, the Associated General Contractors of Maine, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 104, the Associated Builders and Contractors Maine, the E.S. Boulos Company and Cianbro.

These voices are not always unified when it comes to public policy. Some of our members have a long history of stern competition with each other. The New England Clean Energy Connect compels us to work together because it’s good for Maine workers, it’s good for the regional economy and it’s a significant response to threats to our climate future.

We fully support the New England Clean Energy Connect, an electricity transmission project that would deliver a major source of clean, renewable and affordable energy from Maine’s border with Québec into the New England electricity grid.

I will leave it to others to speak in detail about the tremendous value to Maine posed by the Clean Energy Connect. Speaking to the specifics of this legislation, we oppose it for the following reasons.

It would needlessly delay a vital clean energy project that not only makes a major down-payment on moving the entire region toward carbon neutrality by mid-century and that significantly addresses a looming crisis in regional electricity supply, but that also provides a billion dollar boost to Maine’s economy -- without costing Mainers a penny.

It proposes an 11th hour disruption to well-established permitting policies that carefully balance the diversity of public interests. The regulatory and permitting processes the legislature has delegated to state agencies are justified, in part, to insulate decisions from political pressures; this bill circumvents that insulation.
The limited application of the DEP review proposed in the bill, to a single project, is a tacit admission that the policy poses risks of unintended consequences; if it’s good policy, it ought to apply universally.

As a former member of the Appropriations Committee, I observe that the bill proposes no appropriation nor allocation to fund the review, limiting its depth to whatever resources the department can scrounge; if this one-off policy change is a priority of this legislature, it ought to be sufficiently funded.

Finally, the language in Section 1, concerning the department’s review, nebulously restricts the department from issuing a permit for the Clean Energy Connect “without taking into account the results” of its review; yet it offers no criteria, no benchmarks against which the department is meant to take these results into account. This imprecision will make the task before regulators even more challenging, even more subject to second-guessing, at time of already heightened public sensitivity and division.

With great respect to the sponsors and their sincerely-held concerns, we urge you to move this legislation ought not to pass.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective with you. I would be happy to take your questions and answer them now or, if necessary, prior to your work session.