

# Joint Petition to the Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC) Regarding Net Metering - Summary

Since Maine's net metering law took effect 30 years ago, the state's solar energy industry has gradually grown to employ more than 300 people. Yet at a time when the solar industry is expanding rapidly throughout New England, Maine's solar market is in last place in terms of installed capacity and employment. The primary reason Maine lags behind is that we lack an effective solar policy. The Maine Legislature came very close to passing a comprehensive solar bill this year, and legislative leaders in both political parties have indicated that they will revisit the issue next session. Despite strong evidence that distributed solar is a cost-effective resource that provides net financial benefits to all electricity consumers, the Commission's pending review of net energy billing (aka "net metering") adds major new uncertainties and could further harm Maine's solar market and impair prospects for consensus policymaking.

**Therefore, the undersigned petitioners respectfully request the following:**

- 1. The PUC proceeding should have a narrow scope that reviews but does not change net metering at this time, in order to enable lawmakers and stakeholders to continue to work on a policy framework for solar.**

While we acknowledge the Commission's rules now require a review of net metering, the vast majority of evidence from analyses across the country shows that net metering provides important net benefits to all ratepayers, whether they have solar or not. Distributed solar is increasingly recognized as a cost-effective resource that can provide important system diversity and reliability benefits, in addition to the societal benefits such as better air quality and good jobs. Furthermore, it is clear that Maine lawmakers intend to reconsider solar policy next session. Making regulatory changes at this point could disrupt the effort by a diverse group of stakeholders to continue working together on policy solutions that maximize ratepayer savings while unleashing strong solar job growth. Neither a prolonged review nor considerations of novel approaches for regulating or promoting distributed solar are warranted by the Commission at this time.

- 2. To prevent greater harm from the uncertainty that is *already* disrupting the Maine solar market, the PUC should quickly establish that it will not consider changes that would affect existing net metering customers.**

Uncertainty about net metering is already having a negative impact on prospective solar owners—from individuals to businesses to whole communities—and therefore on solar installers as well. While we presume that the Commission will not seriously entertain changes for existing net metering customers, the Commission should make this clear *from the outset of its review*. Continued or exacerbated uncertainty through the summer and fall construction seasons would further slow solar investment and put existing solar jobs at greater risk.

- 3. The PUC should review both the costs and benefits of net metering, taking into account the full value of solar.**

Even a relatively expeditious review (e.g., one appropriate for a review at 1% of peak load) should include information about all of the costs and benefits of net metering for all ratepayers, both solar customers and non-solar customers. Recent analysis and statements from the Commission to the Legislature suggest the Commission may be inappropriately focused primarily on the costs of net metering from a utility perspective, without considering the full, long-term effect of net metering from a consumer perspective. The review can be streamlined by including relevant studies from Maine (e.g., the Commission's own *Value of Solar* study) and elsewhere in the region and nationally. The PUC should reset the review trigger to a level that better warrants a deeper evaluation of net metering.

Signed:

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