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Solar Allies Testify: Without Net Metering, Maine's Solar Jobs Will Disappear

AUGUSTA, Maine, March 16, 2016 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Today, dozens of solar allies flooded the Legislature's Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee hearing to testify in support of giving consumers the option to solar net meter. Maine lawmakers are currently considering legislation that eliminates net metering, the time-tested billing mechanism that gives fair credit for the power that solar users send to their neighbors. Mainers testifying said that without net metering, the proposal gives too much control to monopoly utilities and could lead to new taxes on solar users and higher electricity rates for all customers.

When Nevada eliminated net metering right before Christmas, over a thousand solar workers lost their jobs. Stakeholders are concerned that the same thing could happen in Maine.

"The solution is to retain net metering as a side-by-side option to ensure that Maine does not lose its some 400 solar jobs, which depend on net metering," **said Chris Rauscher, Director of Public Policy for Sunrun and a Maine native**. "Another paper mill announced that it was closing earlier this week. Do we really want to risk hundreds more jobs on an untested policy?"

A near unanimous 91% of Maine voters polled earlier this month say that Mainers should be allowed to generate solar electricity on their rooftops. More than two thirds of voters want net metering and support for net metering is diverse and broad-based. A strong majority of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents favor Maine's current net metering market structures.

Maine voters are ready to back up their support of net metering at the polls, with 61% saying they would be less likely to vote for a Maine politician or regulator who wanted to get rid of solar net metering and replace it with policies that are more favorable to Maine's energy monopolies.

Maine's support for solar is reflected nationally. Last week, a utility market research group partnered with a utility trade association to publish a new poll that shows that 80% of respondents think that policy makers should encourage those who install rooftop solar.

A fundamental concern shared by many groups testifying is that elected officials do not have enough control over the new solar program. The next legislature will not be required to approve the rates coming out of the unelected Public Utilities Commission. This means the rates could be set extremely high or extremely low, without the certainty provided by net metering or legislative review.

Over 4,000 Mainers have signed a petition to the Legislature, urging Maine regulators and lawmakers to preserve current net metering policy as an option for consumers who want to go solar. Maine solar installers, local and national businesses, environmental organizations,

and the Solar Energy Association of Maine delivered the petition to Legislators last month.

Contact: Lauren Randall, lauren.randall@sunrun.com, 781-608-1485

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