Comments submitted via electronic mail by Abode Energy Management

Subject: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

Hi Sy Coffey,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft proposal for the Maine Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program. We appreciate the thoughtful work that has gone into developing the framework and welcome the chance to contribute insights based on our direct experience implementing similar models across the Northeast.

Since launching virtual heat pump and decarbonization consultations in 2020, our team has completed more than 24,000 residential and small business consultations across Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. These consultations meaningfully inform statewide programs and customer outcomes. Beyond this direct work, we developed the national training curriculum now used by Rewiring America for energy coaches and have helped build the supporting resources that have enabled over 1,500 trained coaches across 48 states to deliver accurate, actionable guidance within their communities.

As we reflect on the Maine draft proposal, we want to highlight a few themes drawn from our experience:

1. Standardization is critical to reducing misinformation risk.
One of the biggest challenges we have observed nationwide is the risk that energy coaches, particularly volunteers, can unintentionally provide incomplete or inaccurate information. This typically happens when they operate beyond their technical competency or are unaware of important customer considerations. For this reason, we strongly support the proposal's emphasis on standardized training, vetted content, and consistent follow-up resources. Having uniform materials and structured backstops ensures that, even if something is missed during the consultation, customers still receive accurate and comprehensive next steps.

2. The nuances of each home require dynamic, not static, tools.
A static script or checklist is valuable, but insufficient on its own because each home introduces unique variables that can dramatically alter the right path forward. We encourage Maine to consider a dynamic customer-input tool (similar to the Incentive Finder work we helped lead in Massachusetts), which can help stakeholders understand eligibility, incentives, and upgrade pathways based on their specific circumstances. These types of tools significantly improve consistency and reduce coach-to-coach variation. Beyond that, self-service online assessment tools can provide guidance to customers as they begin their decarbonization journey.

3. Centralized data collection is essential for accountability and program learning.
Currently, across the country, there is no centralized way to track the volume or quality of energy coaching engagements, which limits program learning and downstream customer support. We encourage Maine to incorporate a centralized data system that captures customer notes, project status, major barriers, and equipment age. This creates two major benefits:

- It allows program administrators to see trends, common obstacles, and program gaps.
- It provides a basis for strategic follow-up, especially for customers who may not be ready today but will be ideal candidates in 3–5 years based on equipment age or prior interest.

4. Abode has a proven track record and would welcome the opportunity to support Maine. Our work has evolved significantly over the past five years. We now combine technical building science expertise, decarbonization planning, contractor navigation support, and detailed follow-through with customers. Our innovative decarbonization programs have

driven over 24,000 subsequent consultations, helping customers and contractors make informed decisions and navigate complex program requirements.

We would be excited to engage further with DOER, GOPIF, or other partners as Maine refines the pilot structure. With reasonable funding levels, there is significant opportunity to accelerate customer education and contractor engagement, improve program accuracy, and build durable statewide coaching infrastructure.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer feedback, and please let us know how we can best support the next steps. Best regards,

Travis Estes he/him
Co-Founder & President Abode
Energy Management

Joint Comments on *Draft Document Regarding the Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in the State of Maine*

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the *Draft Document Regarding the Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in the State of Maine.* These comments are prepared by a group of existing energy coaching programs across the state that have met over the past two years, at monthly calls hosted by A Climate to Thrive's (ACTT) Local Leads the Way program, with three goals: (1) sharing information and resources to reduce duplication of effort and support existing and new programs, (2) building a body of best practices and resources to ensure quality of energy coach services, and (3) pursuing funding to support the rapid expansion of energy coaching programs.

Our comments are rooted in direct experience developing and running effective energy coaching programs *and* supporting other communities in developing new programs, as well as facilitating the exchange of resources, insights, and information. We have put extensive thought into how best to support the statewide expansion of energy coaching and how to effectively support coaches and quality experiences for homeowners.

We were grateful for the opportunity to meet with representatives from GOPIF and DOER as they developed this proposal. We recognize the extensive effort that went into the proposal while also feeling a responsibility to underscore certain points based on our direct experience.

Our collective comments are organized in the following manner: overarching comments (relevant across all three proposals), proposal-specific comments, and a suggested pathway forward.

Overarching: Building on the Strong Foundation Already in Place

We want to begin by emphasizing the importance of rooting the proposed program in what will be most effective, not what is most likely to be funded, while recognizing fiscal constraints and the need for efficient approaches.

The mechanism the state seeks already exists: a foundation of effective energy coaching programs, curriculum, continuing education and ongoing support for coaches, attention to liabilities, and understanding of best practices. Building on this base, energy coaching can grow and expand to underserved and remote areas statewide. While the proposals all acknowledge that funding existing work to build off existing expertise would be the most effective and efficient pathway, we recommend amending the first proposal to more effectively accomplish multiple goals from all three proposals.

First, it's important that the state not create a top-down structure to expand coaching but instead foster the growing collaborative network of existing programs rooted in diverse Maine communities.

Second, we want to emphasize the amount of administrative time and resources required to support successful energy coaches. Following outreach and recruitment, energy coaches require initial and ongoing training and support to ensure they effectively handle the many challenges that arise *and* that they can integrate new technologies and updated information into their services. This type of support is a time-consuming process and requires expertise on the part of those providing the support. Building and reinforcing the community partnerships needed to effectively reach low- and moderate-income households also requires extensive time.

Third, program continuity is essential for the reputation of energy coaching locally and statewide. To quote from a Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory report on *Driving Demand for Home Energy Improvements*, **"**Persistence and consistency are valuable—It takes time for partnerships to take root, for word to reach consumers, and for contractors to respond to the opportunity. Consistent programs that last for more than a year or two can create a more robust market for home energy improvements; ephemeral programs can undermine trust."

Extensive time – far beyond a one- or two-year period – is needed to build trust for and interest in energy coaching, particularly with underserved and vulnerable populations. And the coaching process itself can be protracted. Contacts with a homeowner – from initial visit, through review of contractor bids for multiple projects, to check-ins on how best to use new technologies like heat pumps – can stretch for several years.

There is no specific formula for when the need for support might arise during a project, as the specifics of different homes, homeowners, and contractors vary greatly. This is another reason why extensive, ongoing training is essential for energy coaches and why consistency in relationships is a cornerstone of effective coaching.

Throughout time, coach programs need to adopt and reinforce best practices (including client-tracking systems) to avoid delivering inconsistent and sub-par coaching services that could undermine the reputation of programs statewide. As the Lawrence Berkeley report notes, "effective programs will tend to be tailored to the location, thoughtfully researched and piloted, personalized to the target audience, and more labor-intensive than simple incentive programs."

Fourth, contractors are scarce in many of the communities targeted (particularly in underserved and remote communities) and the build-out of energy coaching statewide needs to factor in that scarcity and align with efforts to increase contractor availability to be effective.

Fifth, we want to acknowledge the effectiveness of the Community Resilience Partnership Community Action Grants as a funding pathway to help establish new energy coaching programs. These grants have helped several new programs get started and build out resources that can be shared by other coaching initiatives. Creating a funding pathway focused on Energy

Coaching programs under the framework of Community Action Grants with additional funding support could be effective since the level of application requirements and reporting are already established and manageable for all communities. It would be important not to require a municipal sign-off in that case, though, since not all towns initially recognize the benefit of an energy coaching program.

Sixth, in the draft first and second proposals that cite coordination across multiple state agencies, it's unclear who the central coordinator/facilitator will be and how that entity will ensure the presence of shared understandings, quality training, ongoing coach support and service, and effective attention to liabilities. This role is currently filled effectively by the statewide collaborative network led by A Climate To Thrive, not unlike the role played by HeatSmart Alliance in Massachusetts.

Finally, seeking continuity of support for energy coaching over the long term, we share considerable concern over placing the future of expanded energy coaching statewide in a department that could be impacted by political shifts.

Proposal One

Based on our experience developing, implementing, and supporting energy coaching programs, Track One within Proposal One is the best fit for effectively supporting the growth of successful energy coaching programs in Maine. We do suggest specific amendments to Track One to ensure success and, in particular, to better meet the goal of bringing high-quality energy coaching to underserved and remote communities.

Much of the structure of Track One already exists but it requires ongoing funding to maintain and increased funding to expand the geographic scope, reach more households with low and moderate income, and boost participation in state incentive and energy assistance programs. Currently, according to Beech Hill Research, 12-17 percent of Maine households with low and moderate income participate in energy assistance rebates/incentives versus 30-35 percent for moderate to high incomes.

Energy coaching programs statewide and regional clusters of existing programs already connect monthly to establish best practices and exchange information. To further expand this existing structure for greater impact requires funding support.

The Track One description is not currently clear on who would be providing both the training and continuing education for coaches and how that training is funded.

For our suggested amendments to Track One targeted at expanded impact and a particular focus on meeting the goals of Track Two, please see our "Suggested Pathway Forward".

Track Two raises considerable concerns, both in terms of potential impact and quality assurance.

- It would be a heavy lift for two coaches to cover an entire county, particularly a remote one. Again, it takes a significant amount of time to build awareness and trust within a community, and it then can take years to support homeowners through the consideration and completion of projects.
- Placing coaches in organizations that do not host an energy coaching program does not feel effective to those of us with energy coach experience. We suggest a different pathway to reach such communities in our "Suggested pathway forward." The day-to-day, ongoing needs to adequately support energy coaches are significant, and supervisors need an in-depth understanding of the specific challenges coaches face. Ideally, each host entity would provide this in-depth understanding and be connected to the statewide network of other coaching programs. Providing this type of day-to-day support would be a considerable strain for a community-based organization already likely overburdened with the delivery of their existing mission and services in the underserved community.

Proposal Two

This track shows the greatest potential for significant issues that could undermine the reputation of energy coaching statewide, particularly regarding quality assurance issues.

- Expertise in energy coaching programs is hard-won and time-intensive. If Corps members are serving as energy coaches, it's essential that they are trained and provided continuing education and support by an entity with extensive experience in energy coaching. This is particularly important if these Corps members are serving underserved and remote communities in which additional challenges are likely.
- Again, it takes considerable time to build trust and interest in energy coaching, and then more time to support a homeowner through the entire process of considering and completing upgrades. Two-year Corps placements could present a challenge to this timeframe, particularly if Corps members are not folded into an overarching energy coaching program that can provide continuity beyond the Corps members' more limited term.

Proposal Three

As mentioned in our introduction, a resource library is already under development, infused with resources developed by on-the-ground experience from communities running successful energy coach programs. This resource library can expand and extend its impact with state support and outreach, but this work might not necessitate a bill or significant funding.

To ensure continuity of this resource, it would be best to keep the resource library hosted at an institution not likely to be affected by political shifts at the state level.

Suggested Pathway Forward

We suggest the following structure, which blends what we have directly experienced to be effective with frameworks from Track One.

1. Funding for a Statewide Energy Coaching Hub: This hub would provide training and mentorship support for developing and existing programs, create spaces for collective learning and collaboration, host a resource library, and foster widespread understanding of best practices and quality assurance. This hub would ideally be hosted outside state government (to ensure continuity regardless of political shifts) and within an organization with the experience required to effectively perform this role.
2. Funding for existing energy coaching programs: Fund a specific number of existing energy coaching programs with deep experience and the capacity to expand.
3. To address the needs of underserved and/or remote rural communities, we recommend that the State experiment with several different approaches to see what is most effective. We suggest the following pathways to best meet the needs of these populations.
    a. We recommend identifying and funding existing programs with both the interest and capacity to **dedicate monthly coaching hours through their existing coaches to serving underserved and/or remote communities without coaching programs, with related travel expenses funded**. Outreach associated with this service would occur through partnerships with local community organizations and service providers in a manner that is minimally draining on those organizations and service providers. Ideally, funding would also be available for the partnering organizations and service providers within the underserved and/or remote communities to support a specific number of outreach hours. The coaches engaged in this support for underserved and/or remote communities would also bring lessons learned back to the Statewide Energy Coaching Hub.
    b. We also recommend identifying and funding existing coaching programs with the capacity to **train and support coaches from underserved and/or remote communities**. The existing programs would support these coaches with the infrastructure of their existing energy coaching program while the coaches focused on serving their community. Outreach associated with this service would occur through partnerships with organizations and service providers within those communities in a manner that is minimally draining on those organizations and service providers. Ideally, funding would also be available for the partnering organizations and service providers within the underserved and/or remote communities to support a specific number of outreach hours.
    c. The State could fund several full-time “Home Energy Extension Associates” through the University of Maine Extension Offices (in rural and underserved counties) to provide in-person and virtual energy coaching visits to area residents. These Associates could be tied into the statewide energy coaching network for support and could support each other through existing Extension alliances.

    d. The State could also fund two or three positions at DOER to provide virtual visits and in-home visits (within an hour of Augusta) for residents not living within regions currently served by coaching programs. These staff members could be part of the energy coaching network. They could refer out any clients that fell in the territory of existing programs while serving as a backstop for those not able to access any of the current or emerging programs.
4. Finally, if there is a strong desire to connect the energy coaching program with state Climate Corps programs, funding could be provided to train, host, and compensate Climate Corps members at several existing programs or community-based organizations with energy assistance experience (e.g., the Center for an Ecology-Based Economy is not currently supporting a traditional energy coaching program but has conducted a significant amount of energy-specific support within their served communities).

Other potential roles for state leadership and support:

In organizing these comments, we also focused on additional pathways through which the state might best support the expansion of energy coaching throughout Maine. We identified the following potential pathways for state support:

- Provide funding and technical expertise to integrate existing energy coach curricula into the shared energy coach resource hub to create a menu of free training options for new programs and for existing programs to use in the continuing education of coaches.
    - Regularly update the curricula offerings as home energy best practices change.
- Provide (or contract out instruction for) continuing education programming for coaches statewide on topics such as emerging technologies, new or modified incentive programs and recent state legislation that affects home energy upgrades.
- Ensure that changes to Efficiency Maine offerings and other state incentive programs are communicated to the energy coaching network.
- Support coaches and coaching programs to better serve low- and moderate-income households by identifying where state programs are not meeting local needs, how to streamline the application process for state energy assistance programs, and how to increase state support for the basic repairs needed prior to weatherization. State support to address vulnerable populations could include:
    - Develop or contribute to coaching curricula focused on ways to support households that face added financial barriers to energy upgrades and ways to help renters with low and moderate income
    - Provide expertise to coaching programs exploring innovative pathways to fill funding gaps
- Evaluate synergies between energy coaching and efforts to address contractor shortages in remote communities. Consider piloting an energy coaching program pathway focused on workforce development in rural areas that have contractor shortages. An energy coaching program with a workforce development pathway could support energy coaches interested in exploring a career in home efficiency/decarbonization in obtaining building science and/or HVAC credentials (such

as credentials offered through BPI). To incentivize participation, these coaches would receive a stipend for their coaching hours. Once they have received their credentials, the state could offer interested coaches small business mentorship and resources to encourage the development of additional home energy businesses in underserved areas. There may be an opportunity to partner with community colleges and/or local tech programs in schools that offer building science coursework to implement this pathway.

- Ensure integration with state supported programs that serve similar needs/populations, such as Maine Housing programs, WAP, and LIHEAP, to capitalize on outreach synergies. Ensure that service providers are aware of energy coaching offerings and that the energy coaching network is up to date on state assistance programs.
- Provide funds for community-based organizations that are best positioned to reach communities to conduct outreach.
- Fund free energy audits for low-income households as an entry point.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments and for the work that went into the draft proposal.

Comments developed by:

Johannah Blackman, A Climate to Thrive

Mikaela Heming, retrofitMAINE with passivhausMAINE

Rozanna Patane, York Ready for Climate Action

Marina Schauffler, Rockport/Camden Energy Coaching Program

Additional signing parties:

Catherine Mardosa, Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments

Laura Hench, Freeport Climate Action Now

Meggan Dwyer, Rockport Conservation Commission

Jessica Williams, WindowDressers

Amy Eshoo, Director, Maine Climate Action Now

Dr. Sharon Klein, University of Maine School of Economics and MAINECAN co-founder

Allen Kratz, Resilience Works, LLC

Allen Kratz, Principal
Resilience Works, LLC

Climate-change consulting to give our future a future
resilienceworksllc@gmail.com 201-214-7476
resilienceworks.info

Richy Ainsworth, Associate Director, Center for an Ecology-Based Economy

David Gibson, Director of Energy, College of the Atlantic,
Host of Maine Energy Upgrade Program: www.maineup.org

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Tracey Allen

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: "LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment"

I support this program as a home owner and consumer of energy efficient technology. This is a very necessary program to help people navigate the complex decision making processes around buying and installing new technologies. Efficiency Maine does a good job but even they are limited in their expertise as they focus on solar installations. Add on the myriad Federal, State and local programs for financing, and finding a reputable installer once the best option has been decided on and it's a full time job. It took me two years to do all the research to get heat pumps. Having a "coach" would be a big help and I'm sure would encourage more people to switch to greener energy.

Sincerely,

Tracey Allen
Scarborough, ME

--
"This is the lesson. Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never. In nothing, great or small, large or petty, never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.
Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy." Winston Churchill

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Daniel Barstow

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: Energy pilot program

To whom it may concern, I Daniel Barstow resident of Benton, ME am reaching out to you with interest in this program. I certainly hope funding will become available some day and want to be a part of this program. Thank you sincerely Daniel Barstow

For Clerks Use Only

CITY OF BATH

Date:

Supporting Funding for LD 1967, "Resolve, to Design a Maine Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program"

WHEREAS, LD 1967, "Resolve, to Design a Maine Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program," was signed into law on June 18, 2025, marking a significant step forward in supporting Maine residents with their energy efficiency and clean energy goals; and

WHEREAS, the resolve requires a pilot program report to be produced by Feb 1, 2026 for the Joint Standing Commitee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology; and

WHEREAS, the City of Bath's Climate Action Commission looks forward to reviewing that report in detail and supports further action at the state level including full implementation and dedicated funding for the pilot program; and

WHEREAS, the program aims to provide a statewide service to help residents navigate home energy assessments and improvements, connect them with available resources, and offer coaching to make informed decisions about their energy use and clean energy investments; and

WHEREAS, by fostering greater energy efficiency and clean energy use, this program will contribute to lower energy bills for Maine households, enhance indoor comfort, and support the state's climate action goals through reduced energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of the Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program is a proactive measure to empower Maine communities and residents with the tools and knowledge to build more resilient, sustainable, energy-efficient homes; and

WHEREAS, the City of Bath's Climate Action Commission is actively exploring the potential for a Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Program as a tool in implementing the City's Climate Action Plan of 2024;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Bath fully supports the implementation of a state-led Maine Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program and will assist in promoting the program and its benefits to our community members; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Bath calls on state legislators to fund implementation of the program, and calls on state and local agencies to work collaboratively to ensure the successful roll-out and long-term sustainability of the Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program to the benefit of all Mainers.

CITY OF BATH, MAINE
In City Council
January 7, 2026
Date Received, Read, and Accepted
__tabled granted X passed __failed
Attest: _____
City Clerk 8-1

Blue Hill Peninsula Forward, Inc.

P.O. Box 641
Blue Hill, Maine 04614

January 22, 2026

To: Sy Coffey, Department of Environmental Resources, *via email to sy.coffey@maine.gov*

Subject: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

As co-coordinators of Blue Hill Peninsula Forward (formerly known as Blue Hill Peninsula Tomorrow), we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the creation of a pilot energy coaching program in the State of Maine. We offer this comment as the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future and the Department of Energy Resources support the fulfillment of the requirements of LD 1967, Resolve, to Design a Maine Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program

Support for Proposal 1
Having reviewed the three potential pilot-proposal designs, we urge the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future and the Department of Energy Resources to recommend that the Legislature authorize the creation and funding of Proposal 1: the Maine Regional Energy Coach Program.

Proposal 1 proposes Track 1 for regions with existing programs, such as the Blue Hill Peninsula. Track 1 would fund one energy coach coordinator and provide funding and support for outreach initiatives, including reimbursements for volunteers.

Under Track 1, energy coach coordinators would facilitate collaboration among existing energy coach programs within the region, organize training for volunteer coaches, build partnerships with other organizations for education and outreach, build capacity and sustainability, and collaborate regionally.

Alignment with existing mission and community actions
Those proposed actions align with the mission of Blue Hill Peninsula Tomorrow, an important part of which is helping communities achieve energy efficiency and greenhouse gas reduction.

Accordingly, we support Proposal 1 based on the experience of towns on the Blue Hill Peninsula. In 2022, the Town of Brooklin, participating in the Community Resilience Partnership, established the Brooklin Climate Response Committee. This organization of volunteers is engaged in implementing strategies proposed by the Maine Climate Council to improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They initiated a "Neighbor to Neighbor" energy coaching program, building on the success of a similar project that had previously operated in Unity, Waldo County, with funding from Efficiency Maine Trust.

In 2023, the Town of Brooklin secured the two-year services of an Island Institute fellow to administer the committee's Neighbor to Neighbor energy coaching program. In 2024, as one of the deliverables from a Community Action Grant from the Community Resilience partnership to develop climate resilience leadership in our towns, Brooklin received additional administrative assistance for Neighbor to Neighbor from Climate Resilience Coordinator hired with that grant funding. In 2025, the Brooklin committee expanded its outreach by engaging volunteers to conduct home visits and energy assessments in the neighboring towns of Blue Hill, Sedgwick and Surry. The Brooklin committee's comment elaborates on its program.

Support for regional grantee

Recognizing the value of regional cooperation – efficiencies of scale, greater public visibility and a higher level of experience-based expertise – we as coordinators of Blue Hill Peninsula Forward are ready, willing and able to support volunteer efforts in those and other towns. We support objectives set forth for a regional grantee of energy-coaching funding, i.e., to

- Design and implement an expand energy coaching program tailored to the demographics, energy blend, and housing needs of our regional communities;
- Recruit, hire, and train program staff to fill the regional energy coach/coordinator position;
- With the support of regional partners, conduct outreach to residents, with a focus on low- and moderate-income individuals and households;
- Provide one-on-one coaching to help residents navigate rebates, tax credits, financing options, and,
- Evaluate contractor recommendations.

Potential sources of non-Legislature funding for Proposal 1

Recognizing that the State's implementation of Proposal 1 would require funding, we suggest that the State supplement legislative appropriations by seeking federal funding through existing discretionary grant programs and "earmarks," appropriations that are called Congressionally Directed Spending (in the Senate) Community Project Funding (in the House).

We note that as part of appropriating funds for FY26 during the past few weeks, Congress appropriated $1,199,000 of Congressionally Directed Spending to the Island Institute for a "Grid Resilience and Energy Innovation Toolkit" project. Funding for that project will come from the US Department of Energy's account for the Army Corps of Engineers. The annual federal appropriations process offers opportunities for securing similar energy-efficiency and housing-upgrade grants from the Department of Energy and other federal agencies.

Thank you for considering our support for your important work.

Sincerely,

Allen Kratz Deborah Grimmig J Minor

Allen Kratz, Co-Coordinator Debbie Grimmig, Co-Coordinator Jesse Minor, Co-Coordinator

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Mark Cartier

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

Maine should do this as it would help the state achieve the electrification goals it has set forth.

Mark Cartier

Center for an Ecology-Based Economy

The Maine Department of Energy Resources
The Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future
62 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

January 22, 2026

RE: Public Comment Regarding the Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in Maine

To The Maine Dept. of Energy Resources and the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment regarding the creation of a pilot energy coaching program in Maine. Center for an Ecology Based Economy (CEBE) is a non-profit based in Norway, Maine aiming to engage the community in addressing the climate emergency. We organize, educate, take direct action, and implement practical, ecological solutions for a just transition to a thriving, regenerative economy. We serve the western foothills region with programs focused in food, shelter, energy, transportation, education, and bioregioning. CEBE has also signed on to joint comments compiled by A Climate to Thrive, but is providing additional comments as they pertain to CEBE's work and individual recommendation.

In October of last year, CEBE launched monthly Energy Cafes to serve as an energy coaching program in our community. Each month, we open our office to members of our community to come ask questions about their energy use, get connected to resources, and boost energy literacy. Most recently, we hosted two sessions on understanding your utility bill, which brought in members of our community who had never before attended a CEBE event.

With constant changes to energy programs, billing, and policies, our community members can't keep up, and are missing out on benefits that could be lowering their bills and keeping their homes warmer or more efficient. Energy coaches are becoming a necessary service to our community, and it is a role CEBE is proud to be fulfilling for our neighbors. However, more resources are needed for the wider community's needs to be met. The work we are carrying out largely relies on CEBE volunteers, as project funding for energy coaching is limited. Additionally, there is a distinct lack of independent energy assessment professionals in western Maine, leading to limitations on what resources community members can access. We have discussed workforce development opportunities with our local tech school and other partners.

However, creating more energy professional positions will only support community members who can afford such services. Given that the lowest income homes are often in the greatest need of reduced energy burden and improved household comfort, we would greatly support an energy coaching program that addresses the needs of the low income households first. Having this program linked to a state incentive for reduced cost or free home energy audits would be an

excellent starting point. This is exactly what we hope to support through the Energy Cafes, but working with limited capacity, experience and resources hinders the impact of what we are able to offer.

We hope the following recommendations will help shape the program:

- Include energy coaching program/energy cafes as options in conjunction with the Community Resilience Partnership Community Action Grants, similar to repair cafes/swap shops which were recently added as fundable projects.
- If the state has not already done so, reach out to any national organizations such as Rewiring America that currently offer a short energy coaching program that has been well received.
- In the Maine Regional Energy Coach Pilot Program Proposal 1, the difference between having and not having existing coaching could be better defied. There could be a big difference in levels of those who "*have*." For example Norway's CEBE Energy Cafe has a very light touch compared with York's Energy Coaching program.
    - Similarly, we are aware of existing training developed at the College of the Atlantic, could this or other existing training be replicated to save time/resources?
- Sadly with loss of federal tax credits, there is less to navigate on a federal tax level (there are also existing national guides to support this). We have found that our time has been better spent focusing on energy auditing/weatherization and state incentives.
- Proposal 3 seems to already exist at a national level, and with so many programs already in existence in Maine, Maine specific resources may be redundant.
- In Proposal 1, more clarity is needed on how many regions would be covered, what size these regions might be, and for how long positions might be funded. Ideally programs need to be over long time periods, not just a few years.
- Proposal 2 notes 6 coaches for 12 counties, more clarity is needed on if these positions would rotate or share counties, and if all counties would eventually be covered.

Overall we think the idea of a state wide coaching program is fantastic and will happily support in any way we can.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

Sincerely,

Richy Ainsworth (he/him) - Associate Director
richy@ecologybasedeconomy.org
Center for an Ecology-Based Economy

To: Sy Coffey sy.coffey@maine.gov
From: Ralph Chapman
Date: January 21, 2026
Re: Response to DOER & GOPIF 20260107 Draft

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the "Draft Document for Public Comment Regarding the Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in the State of Maine" prepared by DOER & GOPIF.

INTRODUCTION

I currently serve as the Chair of the Town of Bucksport's Community Resilience Committee (CRC) appointed by the Town Council for the purpose of participating in the Governors Office of Policy & Innovation for the Future's (GOPIF) Community Resilience Partnership. We anticipate making application for grant funding to launch an Energy Coaching program in Bucksport.

Though now retired, I have had a career in engineering, science research, product R&D, science education, and most recently as a Maine State Legislator until term-limited after my eighth year. At one time I provided training of energy auditors through the Maine State Housing Authority's (MSHA) certification program and participated in a national-level energy auditing train-the-trainer program held in Syracuse, NY. As an Applied Physics research scientist at the MIT Lincoln Laboratory, my work was peer reviewed dozens of times. Having secured a federal Department of Labor grant to train unemployed workers with barriers to employment in energy efficient construction skills, through the Pathways out of Poverty program, I delivered an advanced building science course, the only one of its kind that I know of in Maine.

I learned from Tony Gill at MSHA that over a thirty year period of weatherization work that he directed, the average household energy use reduction was over twenty percent with typical pay-back times of less than four years. This amounts to a rate of return on the investment (~25% annually) more than double the annual rate of return (~12%) being offered by the notorious Bernie Madoff with his fraudulent Ponzi scheme.

I applaud the efforts of both the Legislative and Executive branches of Maine's government to expand access to the cost-reduction benefits of improving residential building energy efficiency. Additional benefits are the reduction in the use of fossil fuels, a reduction in the emission of greenhouse gasses, and the opportunity to improve the health, safety, and comfort of our indoor environments.

Energy Coaching provides an information delivery mechanism to engage residents with the goal of hastening the reduction of Maine's housing energy density (energy use per floor area), currently the highest of the 48 contiguous states in the country.

TWO FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

Department of Energy Resources and the Governors Office of Policy & Innovation for the Future seek answers to two fundamental questions:

1. How might an energy coaching program successfully reach low and moderate-income and rural households in Maine?

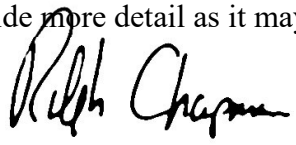
2. How might a Maine energy coaching pilot program measure success?

1) The primary barrier to a successful energy coaching program is the reluctance of vulnerable populations to access available help. This appears to be a matter of trust, possibly stigma, and possibly pride. Apparently personal relationships built over long (many years) timeframes are important ingredients to accomplish the goals of the energy coaching programs. Regardless of how the barrier is overcome, once a home visitation is accomplished, there is an opportunity to provide auxiliary useful information beyond energy efficiency information: household health & safety, emergency preparedness, other municipality resources, etc. Sometimes the energy efficiency information is tied directly to health & safety issues such as consideration of air sealing's danger with respect to non-sealed combustion of fuel burning appliances.

2) Qualitative measures of success and quantitative measures as mentioned in the Draft, leave a missed opportunity: quantitative measures of potential and realized energy savings, cost savings, and greenhouse gas emission reductions. Building energy use models in general have serious flaws in calculating actual use on account of limitations of appropriate meteorological data (particularly sky temperature). Data collection (with a resident's permission) that is simple, quick, non-invasive, and low cost, when aggregated (absent personalized information) would help provide model guidance to better estimate the magnitude of community savings possible.

Scientific expertise in thermal radiative physics is locally available and research funds from other sources could supplement the analysis of collected data, but the energy coaching program is a particularly useful way to access the otherwise difficult to access data sources. I recommend including the possibility of data collection to further characterize, in a quantitative manner, the success of the energy coaching program.

My comments in this section are too brief for a complete technical explanation, but I remain available to provide more detail as it may be desired.



Comments submitted via electronic mail by Nancy Devor

To:	Coffey, Sy
Subject:	Coaching network

Good afternoon:

I'm writing to support the idea of using current energy coaching programs such as we have in York, to train and extend to a statewide network. Funding this program will be important. Perhaps Americorps volunteers could be used in more rural parts of our state.

Sincerely yours,

Nancy Devor

My name is Amelia Neilson; I am currently a Portland resident, but I am active in the climate and conservation space in the Bath and Damariscotta regions (through volunteering with Bath's Climate Action Commission and my job with Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust). I have also been an AmeriCorps member - I spent three years with the Minnesota Conservation Corps completing ecological restoration projects and recruiting and training other AmeriCorps members.

I'll try to keep these comments readable, but I'm wordy, so please forgive me!

1. Energy coaching is a huge need - folks are overwhelmed, including myself, and I know from my outreach work with Bath's Climate Action Commission as well as outreach with the Conservation Corps that personal, 1-on-1 interactions are the most effective ways to enact real change and empower folks to take action on energy saving measures.
2. Bath was extremely successful with a casual, volunteer energy coaching series that took place over three weekends in fall/winter 2025. However, my friends who volunteered their time coaching folks know that continuing to run these pop up coaching sessions is not sustainable for them, and it is likely not sustainable for most folks with a full time job to volunteer in such an involved manner.
3. I appreciate the three levels of potential pilot programs. I also feel it's imperative that we go with Pilot 1 if we want programs to be sustained and truly impact communities. This is worth taking the time and putting the money into.
    a. As a former AmeriCorps member, I fully see the value of something like a Climate Corps initiative that provides job training and opens doors for young people. However, yearly turnover
    b. I have spent time trying to recruit AmeriCorps members in rural areas: it is extremely difficult to attract folks when you are looking for a specific set of skills - many might be interested but come from away and need housing, and in rural areas it can be difficult to find a pool of local young adults to pull from.
    c. If the state went with the AmeriCorps option, we risk yearly/bi-yearly turnover, and while AmeriCorps members do add capacity, it makes it difficult to build and expand programs.
    d. I see a fully-funded, "Pilot Proposal 1" program as something that could end up hosting Climate Corps members within it after a time as the program grows.
4. I don't believe Pilot Proposal 3 would be worth considering - we have lots of resources available right now, and that's part of the problem. It's overwhelming to navigate even all of the good, helpful work folks are doing across the state. We need dedicated, real humans to help people work through their options, particularly folks who are not going to be as comfortable using websites, email, etc. I work with landowners as part of my work, and I still need to rely on mail to reach people.
5. Pilot Proposal 1 is the most likely to reach low to moderate income and rural folks: community members respond best to those they know and trust. Climate Corps fellows, especially if they revolve, may find it difficult to build sustained connections with a variety of trusted individuals and organizations in a given community that can help deliver the message and bring folks to the table for energy assistance.

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Elaine Gallagher

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

Reviewing the three options for the Energy Coaching Pilot Program, I like the idea of energy coaches very much.

I'm an energy and efficiency expert, and I still missed the energy rebates for all of my energy star kitchen appliances, because they sat in boxes in my house for months before they were installed and I thought the deadline to apply would be based on the install date, not purchase date. So even the experts need a little coaching on Maine's programs. I'm a fan.

That said, I do worry about volunteers potentially providing technical advice. I see a lot of "energy efficiency" services in Maine speaking to their own interests and not the homeowner. Be sure to build into training a whole-systems approach to energy efficiency, even if it means putting off an incentivized option. For instance, addressing basic home envelope issues BEFORE replacing equipment is more cost-effective. And there are many different forms of heat pumps, not just mini-splits. Insulation isn't always the smart solution for historic homes, when maybe tightening the home is a better path.

As a parallel program, the State of Maine needs to implement green home appraisal training to make these improvements financially viable. Most appraisers don't know what they're looking at when seeing new energy systems and heating/cooling technologies. I have a Tesla Powerwall, my appraiser told me I should get a diesel generator, and reported in my appraisal that I have no emergency power.

One additional comment for future iterations of the program is that if we don't start talking about water resources and water efficiency, we're going to find the region in a bad place. Water also has a carbon footprint - both municipal and well water. Don't forget that. I recommend including training on water efficiency as much as energy efficiency.

ELAINE M GALLAGHER, AIA, LEED AP, CDP
Stonington ME

GPCOG
GREATER PORTLAND
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

To: Sy Coffey
Maine Department of Energy Resources
Maine Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future
From: Greater Portland Council of Governments
Date: January 22, 2026
RE: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

On behalf of the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) and the Greater Portland Energy Coaches program, thank you for creating an opportunity for feedback and input on LD 1967 for the energy coaching pilot program design. We appreciate the Department of Energy Resource's willingness to support this high-impact work that fosters community resiliency, helps residents save money, and reduces emissions.

Overall, while all three proposals offer distinct benefits, they differ significantly in their effectiveness, cost efficiency, and long-term sustainability.

Climate Corps Pilot Program (Proposal 2) is likely to be the most resource-intensive approach, particularly in regions with limited municipal capacity and dispersed populations. 1-on-1 placements may result in challenges with the scale of impact, supervision and institutional expertise, and limited sustainability once pilot funding concludes. The logistics of a widespread fellow program are incredibly complex.

Resource Hub Pilot Program (Proposal 3) highlights an important need for a centralized hub of information, coordination with incentive providers, and data sharing, but many foundational tools and materials already exist. Rather than investing resources in duplicating these efforts, the State should prioritize dissemination, coordination, and integration of existing resources, ideally as a complementary element within another pilot model. This option alone would not provide sufficient support for most communities.

Maine Regional Energy Coach Pilot Program (Proposal 1) presents the strongest overall foundation for equitable and scalable implementation across the state. To be successful statewide, this option will require greater clarity, flexibility, and differentiation to reflect regional variations in community size, capacity, energy burdens, and overall market conditions.

Maine Regional Energy Coach Pilot Program (Proposal 1)
Establishes two tracks of energy coaching programs and funds one regional project from each track. Track 1 (for regions with existing programs): funds one energy coach coordinator and provides funding and support for outreach initiatives which can include volunteer reimbursements. Track 2 (for regions without existing programs): funds two energy coaches and provides some funding for outreach.

- Rural and urban communities face distinct barriers and opportunities that warrant differentiated approaches within a single "region." A program model that works well for coastal or more urbanized communities may not translate effectively to inland and more rural communities. The pilot should explicitly allow for different programmatic models within a region, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all structure.
- Clarifying and being intentional about what constitutes a "region" will be critical to successful implementation. Depending on population size and density, a full-time regional coordinator could be fully occupied supporting just a small number of communities, or with just program administration. In rural areas, geographic spread, travel time, and limited local capacity significantly increase the level of effort required for outreach, coordination, and follow-through.
- Many communities across GPCOG's service region are also experiencing capacity constraints for both residents and municipal staff. While a regional coordinator can play a valuable role in project management and program navigation, meaningful involvement from municipal staff and trusted local partners in outreach and engagement remains essential. Local staff understand community dynamics, existing trust relationships, and the most effective channels for reaching residents.
- Finally, rural communities are likely to require a stronger emphasis on trust- and relationship-building as a core program function, particularly in areas with limited prior exposure to state or regional energy programs. Allowing additional time, flexibility, and locally driven engagement strategies will be critical to establishing an effective and durable program structure.

Climate Corps Pilot Program (Proposal 2)
A Climate Corps program that places members within Maine communities to provide 1-on-1 assistance to residents and conduct outreach within their service communities.

- The short-term positions of Climate Corps members make maintaining community relationships and institutional knowledge a challenge. A one-year term would not provide enough time to move some households through the process.
- Further, training new Corps members, even every two years, would be a significant investment of resources in knowledge that would then be lost.
- In our experience with the Resilience Corps, managing Corps members requires intensive in-person support and ongoing coaching and professional development investments to ensure successful and fulfilling placements. This support would be very

difficult to deliver across the whole state to Corps members placed in geographically diverse and far away communities.
- This option also seems the most expensive to deliver and most logistically challenging.

Resource Hub Pilot Program (Proposal 3)
Create and distribute standardized resources and materials to support communities in implementing their own programs. Train-the-trainer approach with some inperson "training" events.

- Some of our communities who are developing their own coaching programs could benefit from a centralized resource hub with Maine-specific training, resources and formatted content for coaches. However, this is not material that needs to be created from scratch. There is a lot of material and training that already exists from Efficiency Maine, national networks (our coaches are all doing Rewiring America training) and other programs. These existing resources could be reviewed, customized, and formatted to be easily accessible to Maine communities.
- Enhance existing rebates to further decrease the funding gap, especially for low-income households
    - Rural communities in and around Cumberland County tend to experience higher overall energy burdens, often in the range of 4–6 percent, compared to 2–3 percent in coastal communities within the same region.[1] This suggests both a greater need for targeted support and a higher potential impact if barriers to participation can be addressed.
- A key partner in any energy coaching program is the incentive provider. Efficiency Maine would need to play a central role in this resource hub. For this hub to function as support for programs, it would need to provide access to regular, timely, standardized data sets and materials that support energy coaching outreach, education, engagement, metrics tracking, and technical assistance. It would make sense for this hub to work both ways as well – to be a mechanism for collecting feedback and information on the application of Efficiency Maine's incentives statewide, so that tweaks and adjustments could be made based on challenges energy coaching programs are facing.

How might an energy coaching program successfully reach low- and moderate-income and rural households in Maine?

- Building strong relationships with local community-based organizations that are already working with low- and moderate-income and rural households can help establish a baseline level of trust. These partnerships can also significantly increase program outreach and efficiency of services.

[1] https://www.energy.gov/scep/slsc/lead-tool

- Adjusting incentive programs to meet the financial realities of low- and moderate-income households. Costs are still the biggest barrier, especially with the current incentive structure and eligibility requirements for low- and moderate-income-qualifying households.

How might a Maine energy coaching pilot program measure success?

- Households reached within towns with no prior energy presence, tracking the number of first-time households who have accessed local, state or federal incentive or assistance programs.

Thank you for creating an opportunity for feedback and input on this draft report. We appreciate the thoughtful development of these pilot options and offer these comments to support effective and collaborative implementation of these programs across Maine.

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Rob Grogan

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: Energy Coaching Pilot LD 1967

Good Afternoon,

I just wanted to add a few supportive comments to the LD 1967 proposal for a statewide energy coach program.

I have been a longtime energy efficiency advocate with a focus on building efficiency and electrification. Along the way, I have built hyper-efficient homes, including a geothermal energy star home and now a fully electric net-zero home, but I have also spent significant me retrofitting older buildings. I have also volunteered as an energy coach with York Ready for Climate Action for the past two years, and now chair the board for that organization.

Some trends have stood out throughout those personal and philanthropic efforts, as well as through my professional role as a commercial solar developer. Designing or retrofitting a home or business for efficiency has a lot of moving pieces. For most, knowing what will benefit them the most, how to get started, creating a plan, and figuring out how to pay for it is daunting. Programs and resources shift frequently. Especially for folks who struggle financially, this can seem overwhelming and stop them before they even get started.

As the state looks to continue its significant progress on the Maine Can't Wait plan, it is important that we provide not only financial incentives to the residents and businesses of Maine, but independent, trusted, and trained guidance as well. Having spent several years in homes and businesses talking to people about their needs as a volunteer, it becomes apparent the process takes me and resources, and it takes training. It is best accomplished with local resources who clients can relate to from their community or close by.

So, I support the comments submitted by A Climate to Thrive and York Ready for Climate Ac on among others focusing on a modified proposal 1 track. Local, properly resourced coaches and administrative staff know their communities best and understand local needs and resources. Relying on an all-volunteer program may work in more populous communities with better local government or donor support, but even then it is a struggle. Donors are stretched, and especially in the face of waning federal resources, programs will be harder to keep afloat.

Please consider not only approving a statewide coaching program, but also funding it, as these resources are a force multiplier to the great work at the DOER and orgs like Efficiency Maine in accomplishing the state’s goals around climate and supporting its residents and businesses.

Best regards,

Rob Grogan
YRCA Energy Coach and Board President
Cape Neddick, ME

Island Institute
386 Main Street
Rockland, ME

To: Sy Coffey, Department of Energy Resources

Subject: Feedback on Draft Document Regarding the Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in the State of Maine

Island Institute is excited at the prospect of a state-supported energy coaching program. Given that there are so many efforts geared toward energy efficiency and weatherization popping up throughout the State, it feels like a ripe time for the Department of Energy Resources to pilot a program that will support and amplify those efforts. Members of our team with particular interest and experience in this field have provided feedback on the draft document that can be seen below.

Specific Questions for Feedback:

How might an energy coaching program successfully reach low- and moderate-income and rural households in Maine?

Reaching LMI and rural households requires a multifaceted approach capitalizing on existing community spaces and resources. We frequently say “meet communities where they’re at,” both referring to physical places where people gather as well as meeting them at the stage of thinking, planning, or project implementation where they currently are. Information should be accessible and available in high-traffic areas, such as coffee shops, libraries, community boards, public offices, and community-determined locations.

The way the message is framed also matters. We have had success reaching a more diverse audience by being technology agnostic and by emphasizing comfort, safety, and savings rather than energy efficiency.

We also recognize that having a centralized resource hub is essential. Sharing information across all energy coaching programs will reduce the local lift, which often is bigger for communities with higher percentages of LMI and rural households. This resource hub should include real examples of money saved through energy efficiency measures.

Information should be provided in multiple ways including, but not limited to; in-person events, online resources, mailings, and door-to-door conversations. Recordings of programming should be found in a central, easy to access location online. Community events should also be held at different times during the day and the week to accommodate wider audiences, including working parents, younger populations, older populations, night shift workers, and others with varying schedules or limited flexibility. Similarly, any coaching opportunities should be available before and after regular business hours, and on weekends.

The energy coaching programs should be made attractive to landlords, emphasizing that energy improvements and weatherization are crucial for long-term building health. At the same time, policies should exist that are restrictive to landlords, meaning that they should not be able to set premiums due to efficiency and weatherization improvements. It is recommended that DOER work with MSHA and MOCA to build policy structures to restrict landlords from raising the rent above the rate of inflation for 3 years after energy improvements. This will improve housing security without restricting owners from making a profit.

Information should be shared through an energy coaching program about renters' rights, including minimum heating requirements, unsafe heating systems, and other safety considerations. Pine Tree Legal Assistance offers information about "implied warranty of habitability" to renters on their website. Opportunities for low-hanging fruit investments that can save money should also be emphasized for renters. Some information about these types of investments can be found in the College of the Atlantic's "10 Steps to a Zero Emission Home."

Additionally, any programming should be available to both owners and renters, including energy audits, energy efficiency, and weatherization supports like window dressers builds or incentives for lightbulbs or low-flow showerheads, smart thermostats, pipe wrapping, insulation, and the like.

There is an opportunity to build strategic partnerships with utilities through this program, improve utility to consumer relationships, and reach more LMI and rural households through the billing process with utilities. We recommend that the program specifically partners with utilities to supply a billing insert for potential savings due to behavior change and recommendations for saving energy more generally, including information about the energy coaching program.

How might a Maine energy coaching pilot program measure success?

While proving success is vital to program continuation, we recognize that capacity challenges exist for local organizations. Thus, tracking metrics should be clear, simple, streamlined, and consistent across any programs that are state supported.

We recommend tracking the collection of anecdotal evidence from folks participating in the program. Surveys collecting information on what folks learned in the process and what state incentives they plan on taking advantage of after energy coaching would also be a reliable source of information to glean success.

Quantitative measures could include number of LMI and rural households coached, number of households receiving level 1 and level 2 energy audits, and community-level energy reduction, normalized for extreme weather events. The last recommended measurement would show how

effective weatherization measures are working in extreme heat and cold, and would require utility participation.

A final metric to consider is reduced household energy costs. The process to collect this information may be challenging as it would require not only energy coaching but also the implementation of the recommended actions. There also would be a significant time lag in engagement in an energy coaching program with measured impacts; recognizing these challenges, it may most easily be collected in an optional follow-up survey one-year after energy coaching.

Feedback on Pilot Projects:

1. The first Pilot Program proposal ("Proposal 1") is a design for a Maine regional energy coach program that funds full-time positions at the regional level to support energy coaching across multiple communities;

We believe that regional coordination is crucial to make the most efficient use of limited resources, especially for capacity-strained communities. We also believe that regional programs offer a sense of community sharing and an opportunity to learn from program implementation from those that are further along in their program development This regional approach recognizes that there is no one-fits-all solution, but rather local embedded knowledge and connections that can support energy coaching. However, because there is a tendency for community members to be reluctant to take advice from folks "from away," these individuals should already be embedded in the community.

2. The second Pilot Program proposal ("Proposal 2") funds and places Climate Corps service members in communities to serve as energy coaches; and

A primary concern about the Climate Corps model for an energy coaching program is that communities lacking capacity would not have the ability to apply to be a part of the Climate Corps. These communities tend to be those with higher percentages of LMI or rural communities, exacerbating the difference between regions based on access to resources. Additional funding and capacity may be required to make this an equitable solution.

Another way to make this an equitable solution would be to have a centralized Climate Corps program that places members within specific communities in need. This would be most similar to Island Institute's Island Fellows program that has seen much success over twenty-plus years, or the Conservation Corps.

Another concern about this solution is that because the folks doing energy coaching or supporting the program would be service members, there would not be as much buy-in. Because Maine communities, especially rural ones, have strong feelings about being "from away" we see this as a potential sticking point for success. In order for the program to be successful, meaning that people will follow through with the recommended actions, there needs to be trust in energy coaches, which can be difficult to build with folks "from away."

This solution does address the need for workforce training and development in energy auditing, energy efficiency, and weatherization, where we are seeing a lack of contractors, especially in rural areas.

3. The third Pilot Program proposal ("Proposal 3") creates a resource hub housed at DOER as an alternative method of deploying resources to communities with less cost, resource, and administrative needs.

Our team strongly believes that this pilot proposal should be implemented alongside either option 1 or option 2. Shared resources should be available on the state level to reduce the local and regional burden while keeping up-to-date materials, especially those related to tax incentives or reduced-cost opportunities. Among the existing energy coaching programs in the state that we are aware of, there are already shared resources. With that, we recommend working with those organizations to directly seek feedback on how best to organize and share out with a broader audience while not being extractive of those local organizations. These organizations may welcome a reduced burden of data migration and managing digital literacy requirements for volunteers logging information as well as keeping those resources current.

Standardization and automation, in our opinion, increase efficiency and reduce bookkeeping or tracking efforts. Minimizing the upkeep of resources would reduce overall administrative or organizational burden for largely volunteer organizations that are doing the work on a local level. Beyond that, a statewide resource hub could aggregate data, providing a deeper understanding of our state's energy landscape.

A concern that we have about only implementing this third solution is that it would perpetuate the reliance on volunteers. While we recognize the usefulness and value of this resource, we also recognize that two of the biggest needs in communities serving LMI and rural households are capacity and funding. This would be helpful and additive to their efforts, it is not as vital to their success as additional support whether in the form of people hours or dollars. However, because it would be a low lift for the state and, again, additive to these largely volunteer efforts, it should be invested in alongside option 1 or 2.

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Christopher J. Kessler
39 Stanley Street
South Portland, ME 04106
Phone: (207) 956-0882
Christopher.Kessler@legislature.maine.gov

To: Sy Coffey, Maine Department of Energy Resources (DOER)

Date: January 22, 2026

Subject: Formal Comments on the LD 1967 Pilot Energy Coaching Program Design Report

Dear Sy,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the design of the Maine Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program. To ensure this program meets the mandates of LD 1967 and delivers high-impact results for Maine residents, I am submitting the following recommendations for the final report.

1. Strategic Model: Proposal 3 (Resource Hub)

I recommend **Proposal 3 (Resource Hub)** as the primary model. A central "Resource Hub" ensures that all local and community-based organizations operate under **unified state policy**. This approach prevents fragmented advice and ensures that every energy coach in Maine is working from the same guiding principles and technical standards that underpin state energy policy.

2. Professional Standards & Workforce Pipeline

To ensure the program provides high-quality technical assistance, we must move beyond "informational" coaching toward a professionalized workforce.

- **National Certification Baseline:** All coaches should obtain the **Building Performance Institute (BPI) Building Science Principles** certification. This helps to ensure all participants are learning the same concepts that energy efficiency contractors are expected to understand.
- **Funding via Efficiency Maine:** To make this accessible, the state should utilize the **Efficiency Maine Trust (EMT) scholarship framework**, which already exists to cover costs for professional certifications.
- **A Sustainable Pipeline:** By centering on BPI standards, the coaching program becomes a legitimate workforce development pipeline, moving individuals from community

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coaching into professional energy careers. I can personally attest that a BPI certification gives job applicants an edge when applying for sales or technician jobs.

3. Technical Tools: Moving Beyond "Rule of Thumb"

Energy coaching must be rooted in data to avoid the installation of inefficient or improperly sized systems.

- **Manual J Training:** Coaches should be trained on **Manual J load calculations**. Currently, many contractors use simplified "rule of thumb" methods that fail to capture the nuances of a home's specific design or how recent or future weatherization measures could impact system design. Homeowners could benefit from a room-by-room analysis of their home to help better understand a cost-benefit analysis of certain systems, especially in scenarios where heating and cooling loads are relatively small. It also provides data that typically only HVAC contractors have the capability to provide and historically rarely do.
- **Actionable Decision Trees:** The Hub should feature a decision tree to help homeowners prioritize weatherization (air sealing/insulation) before equipment upgrades and manage system end-of-life transitions.
- **De-emphasizing Home Energy Scores:** I do not recommend a strong focus on Home Energy Scores, which are primarily useful for home sales. Resources are better spent on tools that drive immediate retrofit action.

4. Reaching LMI and Rural Households (The "Eligibility" Hub)

To successfully reach low-income and rural households, the Resource Hub should act as a gateway to broader social safety nets.

- **The Eligibility Navigator:** An interactive tool should identify **"categorical eligibility."** Homeowners enrolled in programs like **MaineCare, SNAP, or LIHEAP** should be automatically identified as eligible for the highest-tier Efficiency Maine rebates (often covering 80%–100% of costs). It should also help connect homeowners to social programs they might not realize they are eligible for. For example, I have personally helped homeowners sign up for MaineCare for their children after a discussion about rebate eligibility.

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- **Renter Rights & Energy Disclosures:** Since "residential consumers" includes renters, the program must educate tenants on their rights, specifically the **Energy Efficiency Disclosure Statement** (Title 14 §6030-C). Coaches should empower renters to request 12-month utility histories, understand what disclosures landlords are legally required to provide, and what legal protections they are entitled to when that disclosure is not furnished.

5. Consumer Protection & Price Transparency

Homeowners often struggle to evaluate contractor bids. DOER should work with Efficiency Maine to analyze anonymized rebate data to publish **"ballpark" cost-per-unit guides** for weatherization and heat pumps. This price transparency could help residents determine if they are in the "right ballpark" and potentially protect them from price gouging. This could also be useful in better understanding contractor markets throughout the state.

6. Minimizing Liability

To address the legislative requirement to minimize liability, the State should implement a dual-disclaimer strategy:

- **State-Level:** A prominent disclaimer on the Resource Hub stating all information is for informational purposes only.
- **Community Level:** Provide a **boilerplate legal disclaimer** for community organizations to use during 1-on-1 coaching sessions to protect local nonprofits from legal risk.

7. Measuring Success

Success should be measured by the **quality of the decisions made**, not just the number of participants:

- **Qualitative:** Use homeowner interviews to determine if the coach was the "determining factor" in their purchase and if the guidance helped them avoid a "worse decision" (like an oversized system).
- **Quantitative:** Track the **avoided lifetime costs** of equipment and the **avoided cost of new generation and transmission** for the grid, particularly when weatherization is paired with heat pumps.

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I believe these refinements will ensure the pilot program creates a more resilient, efficient, and equitable energy future for all Maine residents.

Sincerely,

Rep. Christopher Kessler

School of Economics
www.umaine.edu/soe
Phone: 207-581-3154

THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

5782 Winslow Hall
Orono, Maine 04469-5782
Fax: 207-581-4278

Dear Mr. Coffey,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these public comments on the draft Maine home energy coaching pilot program report.

Background/Context

I have been leading a community-based participatory research program since 2021, focused on community-led energy initiatives in which I work very closely with representatives from all five Wabanaki Nations (the Wabanaki Sustainable Energy Team), six rural Maine communities (the Community Sustainable Energy Team), and many other partners across the State (the Maine community-led Energy and Climate Action Network – MAINECAN, https://mainecan.network/). Part of my work with MAINECAN has included being involved in many conversations about home energy coaching with communities and other partners. For example, I worked with MAINECAN partners to highlight home energy coaching in the MAINECAN session of the Maine Sustainability and Water Conference in 2025. I am working with many of those same partners to highlight this topic again in the MAINECAN session of the Maine Sustainability and Water Conference in 2026. Members of my team and I regularly attend the monthly home energy coaching meetings of Local Leads The Way, coordinated by A Climate To Thrive (ACTT). I have been on multiple other individual and group calls about this topic with key community and organizational leaders in this area. I am a member of the Buildings, Infrastructure, and Housing Working Group of the Maine Climate Council, which has also discussed this topic. And, most recently, I invited staff from State agencies to a Wabanaki Sustainable Energy Team meeting in January to discuss this topic. I have also been a volunteer Board member of the nonprofit organization WindowDressers since 2018, and have participated in and facilitated discussions about home energy coaching within that organization.

My comments below are grounded in this experience and the knowledge I have gained from all of these activities. In addition to these individual comments that come from me alone, I am also a signatory on the joint comments co-developed by A Climate To Thrive, PassivhausMaine, York Ready for Climate Action, and the Rockport/Camden Energy Coaching Program.

1. **Specific Proposal comments**

Out of the three proposals, Proposal 1 is best suited to meet the needs of the communities I work with and the state as a whole. However, I am not convinced this program requires a regional approach – a multi-community approach for sure, but I think it may limit creativity and innovation and ignore some of the practical aspects of ongoing collaboration to require a regional approach. For example, many people who attend the monthly Local Leads The Way calls about home energy coaching may not be in the same geographic region but are united in their goal to establish home energy coaching programs in specific communities or to support

existing programs. I could imagine an organization effectively serving multiple communities that currently have programs (Track 1) that are not in the same geographic area. A Climate To Thrive already does this through their home energy coaching monthly calls. Something like that could be expanded to include additional peer-learning and other grant-related activities that accomplish the intended objective (to support existing programs) without requiring those programs to be in physical proximity.

I can also imagine Track 2 being effective without a regional requirement. Consider the WindowDressers model. The organization works in communities all over the state to support new window insert builds all the time. Each year, communities starting new window insert builds in Maine are not necessarily connected by geography, but WindowDressers connects them for peer-learning in other ways, and they provide the necessary support to train measurers and volunteers in the communities to do the on-the-ground work. Through the Wabanaki and Community Sustainable Energy Teams, my team in the UMaine Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions also connects specific communities for peer-learning that are not in the same geographic region.

In a regionally-focused program, you will need to draw a clear regional boundary. What will that boundary be? County? Clusters of neighboring towns? Something else? In any case, the boundary may create unnecessary obstacles. For example, the boundary may separate the groups identified in the report as already starting programs. Wouldn't it be best to carry that momentum forward by creating a Track 1 cohort of groups already doing programs, regardless of location relative to each other? The peer-learning and other components of the application can still respect unique geographic characteristics of the communities involved in the cohort even if they are not geographically near each other.

Proposal 2 is the next-best suited for communities and the State as a whole. However, it would need to be carefully designed with communities and existing organizations as equal partners to the State. I have been involved in multiple applications to host a Maine Service Fellow and Americorps members more broadly. While incredibly beneficial when everything goes well, hosting these fellows is a complex process with many rules that can be costly and counterproductive to an organization's goals. Organizations involved in Proposal 2 will need to have the capacity for navigating that process, or the process will need to be made much simpler. It is unlikely that organizations based in Maine's most vulnerable communities will have the capacity to host a fellow. Also, there is risk and a lot of work involved in bringing someone into a community temporarily as opposed to other approaches that could be considered. An approach that would align better with organizational goals would be a longer term (e.g., 3-year+) grant for stipends where the organization can hire whoever they see fit, providing more flexibility and security over a longer timeline.

Proposal 3 could have some aspects that may be useful, but it feels a lot like it would duplicate activities that are already in motion by some of the organizations already listed in the report. See #2 for additional suggestions about how to address this issue with Proposal 3.

2. **The proposals feel very top-down, while the approach to develop home energy coaches in the State has thus far been bottom-up. Here are some specific recommendations to more clearly represent existing efforts and be inviting and inclusive of their work going forward:**

At the end of the paragraph at the end of p.6, after the sentence, "Several of Maine's CAAs offer energy coaching as part of their comprehensive services." Add: The Maine-based non-profit organization WindowDressers offers a specialized-type of home energy coaching focusing on window weatherization.

In the table that starts on p. 8, it would be helpful to have a row like Agency Roles that specifies the roles of non-agency partners. Recognizing that home energy coaching is an ongoing initiative across the state and that there are existing people, organizations, and infrastructures in place working on this topic (as recognized by naming specific groups earlier in the report), it would be helpful to include a vision of how those existing people, organizations, and infrastructures may work with the agencies listed in the table to help design and implement the proposed programs (in addition to and beyond being applicants responding to an RFP). For example, I imagine it would be quite helpful for the Local Leads The Way group that meets monthly about Home Energy Coaching, people from emerging and existing coaching programs, and other cohorts thinking about energy (e.g., the Wabanaki Sustainable Energy Team) to work with the listed agencies on designing (and possibly implementing) pilot programs.

Proposal 3 should be edited to reflect the existence of resource hubs being developed by ACTT and others on this topic. Maybe instead of "The state will work with organizations that have successfully implemented energy coaching programs in Maine to develop a resource hub…", it could read "The state will communicate with organizations that are already developing resource hubs for home energy coaching and support their efforts by contributing [materials, guidance, funding, staff, etc.] …"

"State staff will host regional workshops to "train the trainer," to provide guidance on how to develop an energy coaching program and recruit and train volunteers. This program proposes partnering with RPOs to host in-person workshops within the first year of the launch of the resource hub." I would think State staff would also want to partner with existing organizations already providing "train the trainer" type support (e.g., Local Leads The Way, passivhausMaine, York Ready for Climate Action) to design and deliver these trainings (and provide financial support to these orgs for helping develop and implement these train the trainer programs).

3. **It is important to be more explicit about the connection between home energy coaching and energy audits. Home energy coaching visits are not energy audits, but they could be an important step toward encouraging someone to get one or helping them navigate the process, which is important for helping the person navigate appropriate improvements for their home. Here are some areas where I think energy audits could be discussed more specifically:**

On p. 6, edit this paragraph to include the blue language: "Energy coaching initiatives are typically designed to train volunteers or paid staff to help community members identify opportunities to meet their energy needs in a low-barrier setting. Energy coaches may be a helpful no-cost (to the resident) first step before a more official energy audit that costs money. Energy coaches typically provide information and one-on-one assistance to help people understand, apply for, and receive incentives for home energy upgrades and energy bill assistance and access other energy-related programs and resources."

On p. 11, put home energy audits before existing Efficiency Maine programs, and change "developed in collaboration with state entities." to "developed in collaboration with state entities and organizations." Or something to demonstrate more clearly that the trainings will not only be developed in collaboration with entities that are part of State government but also other entities within the State of Maine – for example, passivhausMaine and others.

p. 14, change "How effective are energy coach programs in driving participation among individuals who would not otherwise take advantage of energy incentives and assistance programs?" to "How effective are energy coach programs in driving participation among individuals who would not otherwise get an energy audit or take advantage of energy incentives and assistance programs?"

p. 14, change "each local program will collect information on the number of participants, home upgrades completed, and participant demographics." To "each local program will collect information on the number of participants, home energy audits and upgrades completed, and participant demographics."

4. **Other**

On page 7 "tribal governments" implies meeting with elected officials like the Chiefs and/or Tribal Council members. If this item is solely referring to the meeting with the Wabanaki Sustainable Energy Team or other groups/meetings of people who work for the Tribes or non-government Tribal members as opposed to elected officials, I would recommend changing it to "Tribal government staff and community members".

5. **How might an energy coaching program successfully reach low- and moderate-income and rural households in Maine?**

First, I recommend rephrasing this question to use the phrase "rural households with low and moderate income", which is more inclusive phrasing that avoids labeling a household by its deficit and rather includes factual information about their income status. Second, reaching households with low and moderate income, especially in rural communities takes a lot of time and long-term relationship-building with people and entities in the target communities. WindowDressers is dedicated to providing at least 35% of window inserts for free to households that cannot afford them. To reduce barriers to household members, WindowDressers does not require people to prove their need through tax forms or enrollment in state or federal assistantship programs. Rather, they rely on community volunteers – people

who know the community and the people in it – to identify when a person is in need and may benefit from free inserts. To reach households that may need free inserts, community volunteers work closely with local churches, food banks, and other organizations that provide services to people in need. They often communicate with CAP agencies, asking them to share information about the program. When community volunteers go into homes to measure windows, they pay attention to parts of the conversation and visual evidence in the household that may indicate someone could benefit from free inserts. The organization also offers the option for people to pay what they can afford because sometimes people do not trust something that is free or do not want something that is free because of pride, even if they may need it. These approaches have been carefully developed and tested over the nearly 20 years WindowDressers has been in existence and are directly applicable to a home energy coaching program, which seeks to do very similar activities to what WindowDressers does – bring a community volunteer into a home to talk about energy improvements and possibly offer something of little to no cost to the resident.

I recommend State officials convene one or more meetings of organizations like WindowDressers and others that have a mission to serve people with low and moderate income where they can share their best practices and contribute to the careful design of a program that includes and respects these best practices. In addition to WindowDressers, other organizations I think should be at those meetings include but are not limited to area CAP agencies (especially ACAP), Sunrise County Economic Council, the Sipayik Resilience Committee, UMaine Center on Aging, Catholic Charities, Food AND Medicine, Salvation Army, Good Will, and local food banks, churches, and synagogues. A crucial component of engaging people with low and moderate income in any program is to meet them where they are at. Many of the organizations listed above are the experts in that approach. They are typically helping people meet their basic needs and know where they will be physically for someone to approach them about another program that can help them meet their needs.

Automatic opt-out enrollment in programs is another effective way to reach people in need. For example, I have been a member of the Electric Ratepayer Council for the past 3+ years. A lot of our time has focused on how to get more people in need to sign up for LIAP and LIHEAP. We have supported automatic enrollment in these programs by recommending connecting DHHS databases with LIAP/LIHEAP enrollment so people don't have to fill in more forms and opt-in to programs they may not understand at the start (and may not have the capacity to pay attention to as they seek to meet their basic needs) but can benefit from those programs and have the choice to opt-out if they decide the program is not for them. Meeting people where they are at and automatic enrollment are not just anecdotally proven measures; there is a lot of careful academic research that supports these measures as effective ways to reach people in need.

6. **How might a Maine energy coaching pilot program measure success?**

If one major goal of the program is to reach people with low and moderate income in rural communities, then important measures of success should be **number of house visits** to people with low and moderate income in rural communities and **number of energy-saving initiatives**

those house visits lead to (including but not limited to energy audits, window inserts, insulation, heat pumps and heat pump water heaters, more efficient lighting and appliances, solar energy, electric vehicles, residential batteries, wood pellet boilers, etc. as well as enrollment in LIAP, LIHEAP and any other relevant energy assistance programs).

However, a new energy coaching program may take time to establish the trust and social infrastructure necessary to reach people with low and moderate income in rural areas as effectively as a well-established program, so they should not be held to the same standards as well-established programs. Additional measures, especially for new programs, could include **number and description of attempts at collaboration and depth of relationship-building** with local people and groups who regularly serve people with low and moderate income in rural communities; the **geographic dispersion** of home energy programs across rural areas; **number of events** focused on meeting the needs of people with low and moderate income in rural areas attended by volunteers/staff of home energy coaching programs. Measures to evaluate the sustainability of a home energy program could include **number of volunteers and staff, turnover rate over a specific time, training achieved, and number of residential visits per coach** (total, not only for people with low and moderate income). Collaboration is also important to ensure growth and sustainability statewide, so a measure like **number of and description/depth of engagements** home energy coaches and coordinators participate in that bring coaches and coordinators together across geographies and programs could be useful.
It is important that any measures used do not put extra burden on people with low or moderate income or on the home energy coaches and coordinators. Measures should be easy to track and report. Estimated energy and monetary savings could be calculated by an external person – someone from the state or a consultant – based on simple information collected by coaches during visits and subsequent energy audits.

Finally, income may not be the only demographic to target. It may be appropriate to make sure home energy coaching programs serve Wabanaki Tribes, immigrant communities, renters, older adults living alone, and other people that may historically face challenges that make it difficult to adopt energy saving measures in their homes. If these populations are to become part of the target audience for home energy coaching programs, then **related demographic information** would need to be included in success measures.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sharon Klein
Associate Professor, School of Economics
University of Maine, Orono, ME
207-581-3174
sharon.klein@maine.edu

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Rob Nair

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

I am writing this to express my interest in participating in the home energy navigator and coaching pilot program.

Thank you,
Rob

1/22/2026

Submitted electronically via: EMAIL of sy.coffey@maine.gov

Sy Coffey
DOE Energy Innovator Fellow
Maine Department of Energy Resources
62 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

Dear Sy,

On behalf of Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships (NEEP)[1], I am pleased to submit comments relative to the *Draft Document Regarding the Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in the State of Maine.* NEEP is a non-profit whose mission is to accelerate regional collaboration to promote advanced energy efficiency and related solutions in homes, buildings, industry, and communities. Energy coaching and peer-to-peer collaboration is a powerful community-based vehicle for heat pump adoption and home performance improvements.

We thank the Maine Department of Energy Resources (DOER) and Maine Governor's Office of Policy Innovation (GOPIF) for the opportunity to provide input on the draft document. We commend DOER and GOPIF for adding a public comment period that was not required by the Resolve. The draft potential pilot program design approaches are an impressive start to this discussion. The following comments are intended to provide technical assistance and resources relating to community energy coaching. NEEP has tools and resources available, as well as direct technical assistance.

Introduction

Energy Coaching first gained interest in the 2000s with Solarize campaigns, a series of community-based education programs intended to drive residential solar adoption. In the late 2010s, New York and Massachusetts pioneered municipal coaching programs for heat pumps via pilots hosted by NYSERDA and the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. Building on these early programs, energy coaching has evolved and become more popular, with new programs launching every year. NEEP supports local municipal, non-profit, and community-based organizations launching energy coaching programs across the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions with resources and direct technical assistance.

In Maine, community groups, including municipalities and non-profit organizations, have established a strong energy coaching network led by the climate advocacy organization A Climate to Thrive (ACTT). Participants in this network have direct experience putting coaching models into practice. They meet regularly to share resources and best practices to foster more programs.

[1] These comments are offered by NEEP staff and do not necessarily represent the view of the NEEP Board of Directors, sponsors or partners. NEEP is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that does not lobby or litigate.

Coaching is an effective program model because of its local nature and low-cost implementation. Rather than relying on financial capital, coaching programs require time and labor, often from volunteers. Well-trained coaches are effective at dispelling myths and directing residents to reputable sources of information. Coaches can also direct residents to available local, state, and federal incentives, acting as a marketing tool for energy efficiency programs.

Each of the plans proposed in the draft pilot energy coaching program has strengths and weaknesses. For the development of a state energy coaching program framework, Maine should leverage existing knowledge. The following letter offers general comments.

Work Within Pre-Existing Networks and Utilize Resources That Have Already Been Created

Active Community in Maine

The Local Leads the Way Energy Coach Network, led by A Climate to Thrive, includes a steadily growing cohort of non-profits, municipalities, and advocate groups who have direct experience with energy coaching. This group has already collected many best practice resources and tools to support future coaching programs.
In q1 2026, NEEP is publishing the resource "Launching Community Energy Coaching Programs: An Implementation Toolkit and Guide" to assist municipalities interested in launching an energy coach program. The guide builds on experiences from established programs in Massachusetts and Maine, outlining the administrative roles and responsibilities needed for a local energy coach program and sharing tools and best practices for program design and implementation. The Toolkit outlines the key qualities of a coach and offers guidance on how to find participants, legal considerations, risk mitigation guidance, communication strategies, and template website language. This resource can be used by any entity looking to launch an energy coaching program. NEEP has been engaging with the Local Leads the Way Energy Coaching Network, continually adding new resources to the toolkit to ensure its ongoing relevancy.

Training for Energy Coaches

The Building Performance Institute has two great introductory building science certificates of knowledge. The draft document mentions the Building Science Principles (BSP) Certificate, but they also host the Total Building Performance (TBP) Certificate. BSP provides a foundation of building science. TBP takes this to the next level by introducing more complex topics like electrification, energy modeling, decarbonization, and customer engagement/satisfaction. TBP is an excellent resource for perspective energy coaches.
While the BPI certificates create a strong foundation for building science, they are self-guided and are not specific to energy coaching. There are two training courses that are specific to training energy coaches. The nonprofit organization Rewiring America hosts training for national cohorts, while the nonprofit organization, HeatSmart Alliance hosts a Massachusetts-based training. Both courses are virtual and free for participants, allowing for increased flexibility. These programs could be utilized to train coaches in Maine. Additionally, the state could partner with local organizations already working on coaching programs to develop a Maine-specific program model. passivhausMaine located in Freeport Maine, is an example of an organization with the capability to design a Maine-focused coach training.

Unsolved Challenge: Customer Relationship Management Platform

A recurring challenge with community coaching is access to an effective, low-cost Customer Relationship Management tool. Hosting an energy coaching program requires complex engagement tracking, which can quickly overwhelm a spreadsheet. For community-based energy coaching programs, CRMs need to be easy-to-use for a broad range of volunteers but sophisticated enough to adequately track engagement and evaluate program impacts such as client follow-through. Many free options do not have these capabilities, are confusing to use, or are not able to adequately secure participant data. Other CRMs are prohibitively expensive for community programs. To resolve this barrier, the state of Maine could procure an adequate CRM on behalf of community energy coaching programs.

Ideas for rural implementation

Regional or shared energy coaches can be an effective way to offer services to rural areas that do not have the population density to support local coaches. To resolve this issue, existing programs could offer services to neighboring towns or rural areas while new coaching programs are being developed

Peer-to-peer coaching does not need to be an in-person experience. There are many coaching programs in Massachusetts that offer virtual-only consultations. This reduces the workload and time commitment of coaches, allowing them to manage a larger project portfolio while reducing the risk of burn-out. Virtual consultations also reduce the risk of injury or property damage, a risk that is inherent with in-person visits. Additionally, virtual-only coaching programs would allow the state, or local coaching entity to reach hard-to-target rural populations.

Conclusion

Maine is taking an exciting step with *LD 1967 Resolve, to Design a Maine Home Energy Navigator and Coaching Pilot Program*. Community Energy Coaching is a proven, low-cost pathway to improving the performance and comfort of Maine Homes that will support the state in achieving state climate and heat pump adoption goals. These comments are intended to support the work currently underway with the Energy Coaching Pilot in Maine, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide input. NEEP is available to provide technical assistance and support DOER and GOPIF with the design and implementation of the Energy Coaching Pilot.

Sincerely,

Andy Winslow
Manager of Community Solutions
Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships
awinslow@neep.org

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Sherry Putnam

To:	Coffey, Sy
Subject:	Energy coaching

I think this program could be very helpful to homeowners and possibly landlords.

Thanks,
Sherry Putnam

LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

Brooklin Climate Response Committee Neighbor to Neighbor Energy Coaching Program

BACKGROUND

The Brooklin Climate Response Committee (BCRC) was started in the Fall of 2022 in response to Governor Mills' Community Resilience Partnership Program. In January of 2023, we made our first Neighbor to Neighbor home visit to a Brooklin residence. To date we have made 53 visits, almost all to homes in Brooklin.

Initially, our program was entirely volunteer based. In September of 2023, an Island Institute fellow joined our program, staying with us through April of 2025. She worked for our committee about 30 hours/week; at least a third of that time was spent on the home visit program. Her participation greatly increased our reach. Since September of 2025, our program has had the assistance of the Climate Resilience Coordinator for Blue Hill Peninsula Forward, as we try to spread this program to other towns on the peninsula.

Our original BCRC coaches were members of our committee who had interest in the program and varying levels of familiarity with the technologies we promote. As we prepare to expand this program across the Blue Hill peninsula, we have assembled a growing group of volunteer coaches. As yet, there is no formal training of coaches, instead they learn by attending several visits with experienced coaches. These new coaches all have personal experience with efficiency upgrades in their own homes. This group meets monthly to help bring new coaches up to speed and discuss issues that can arise during visits.

We feel that our Neighbor to Neighbor Home Visit Program is poised to begin a much wider operation on our peninsula. The product has been well honed during our three years of operation in Brooklin, we have a committed group of coaches that are nearly ready begin home visits, and we have administrative procedures ramping up with the help of Blue Hill Peninsula Forward.

DESCRIPTION OF BCRC NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR HOME VISITS

A BCRC Neighbor to Neighbor home visit generally involve two coaches, who visit the home of a resident who has signed up with us. Contact is usually established via a signup sheet at one of our educational events, potlucks, other local events, newspaper articles, or word of mouth. A visit usually lasts 90 minutes. Roughly 50 minutes is spent talking with the homeowner, listening to their concerns,

Brooklin Climate Response is a Committee of the Town of Brooklin, PO Box 219, Brooklin, ME 04616
Si Balch, Corrinne Collett, Steve Hindy, Doug Hylan, David Porter, Catherine Princell, Karl Schoettle, Lars Selberg

and running through a list of ways they can reduce their energy consumption – insulation, Window Dressers inserts, heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, induction stoves, etc. We discuss EV charging, solar electricity options, and backup batteries. The remaining time is spent inspecting their cellar, attic, windows, appliances, and electrical service entry capacity. The visit is followed by a written report, about five pages of observations and recommendations, with a final conclusion aimed at what we think are the most expedient and impactful steps forward. An sample report is included at the end of this response document. We also send a curated resource sheet covering Efficiency Maine resources, tax incentives, and EMT registered installers.

The BCRC Neighbor to Neighbor program does not attempt to do formal energy audits, nor do our coaches perform insulation or air sealing services: instead, we connect them to EMT registered installers. We look to inform homeowners of a variety of ways that they can move towards greater electrification and the attendant benefits for health, comfort, and financial savings. We work to help people navigate the EMT system, connect them with Window Dressers, help them understand our solar interconnection landscape, and encourage them to consider an EV for their next vehicle.

CHALLENGES

Administration and Promotion

We believe administration and promotion are the primary areas that need support to expand energy coaching on the Blue Hill Peninsula. When our Island Institute Fellow was working with us, she spent roughly 10 hours/week administering our Brooklin-only program. The Climate Resilience Coordinator at Peninsula Forward is now trying to do a similar job for nine towns with about half the time. A Community Development Officer from Island Institute is providing some limited hours this winter to help with promotion. We have little capacity for gathering and quantifying results.

When the Neighbor to Neighbor was only operating in Brooklin, we kept the cost of promotion and educational materials small. Going forward, professionally printed materials, paid advertisements, and mailings will require funds. Since the departure of our Island Institute Fellow we have found it difficult to sustain efforts to coordinate with other organizations (such as social service and environmental groups) as well as post notices in publications and on social media.

Keeping current with changing government and private resources available for home owners takes a level of effort hard to sustain with volunteers only. Having this information available for the coaches during visits, as well as for creating reports, is an important component of the program.

Post Visit Follow Up and Data Gathering

The BCRC has also found it difficult to follow up after home visits for additional assistance with signing up for programs, answering additional questions from residents, and determining if clients has made energy upgrades. The Island Institute Fellow was helpful with short term follow-ups, but sustaining a long term system of data collection is difficult when relying on volunteers. We attempted to gather data with a survey of home visit participants, but this was not successful. We have anecdotal information on which home visits resulted in clients implementing recommendations, but it may take several years to assess complete results. This is especially true for low and moderate income residents who face challenges financing the gap between Efficiency Maine incentives and the total cost of a project.

Reaching Out to Vulnerable Populations

Our program has had difficulty getting low income residents to sign up for home visits thus far. One contributor: a committee of retired folks, many of whom are "from away," do not necessarily cross paths with low and middle income working families enough to be invited into their homes.

FEEDBACK
Document for Public Comment Regarding the Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in the State of Maine

The BCRC believes that all three proposals have valuable components. We need a system that helps people understand their energy management options. It should gather and distribute consistent information state-wide. In addition, this system should also be adaptable for local needs.

Proposal 1, Track 1
An energy coach coordinator at a regional level, in our case the Blue Hill Peninsula, is very much needed. Duties would include outreach to potential clients, scheduling, follow up coordination, data gathering, promotions, sustaining relationships with social agencies to assist reaching vulnerable populations. Extrapolating from our experience in Brooklin, a coordinator at the Blue Hill/Deer Isle region level would likely be, at minimum, a full time position. We believe keeping coordinators as local as possible is important for maintaining relationships with local volunteer coaches, social service organizations, and for understanding the needs of our population.

Since Brooklin has a maturing energy coaching program and has begun expanding it to the peninsula, track 2 does not seem to apply to us.

Proposal 2

We believe that a Climate Corps approach will have difficulties fitting into many rural communities. Building trust is important for residents to accept an unknown person coming into their home, particularly someone coming from a state run organization. That said, we believe a trained CC member could be very helpful adding in manpower to our volunteer crew of energy coaches.

Proposal 3

- A Resource Hub would be a helpful complement to any energy coaching program. It would obviate the need for each regional organization to create, vet, and update their own materials.
- Our volunteers come with different backgrounds and prior knowledge. Training will help with getting all volunteers to a consistent baseline knowledge, and to learn about changes in technologies related to home energy usage.
- Creating standards for metrics and data gathering would be extremely helpful for development of our own program and to send information back to the state.
- Marketing materials would be helpful, especially if they include consistent visuals.

Liability and Risk Reduction

Section 1. As a Brooklin only program we were covered by the town's liability policy. As a regional group our town coverage is not applicable, which is a cause for concern. Does the state have a plan to respond to this?

Section 3. Do you mean the coaches or the clients? Presenting a homeowner with a liability waiver prior to a home visit could be off-putting.

Section 4. A background check discourage coach recruitment. Who pays for the background checks and keeps them on file?

Section 5. We never recommend individual contractors. We provide them with a list of local EMT registered providers.

Technical Assistance and Educational Materials

Use of home energy scoring systems. It seems that complex scoring systems are best done by professional energy auditing firms. We found that people considering a home visit are very resistant to being "ranked" in anyway, which can be perceived as being judged.

Checklists

Our program employs a simple checklist help coaches stay on task. Our experience is overly detailed checklist are not helpful. See our sample report.

Client management system. We have been using Asana to keep track of visits. If it was simple to use, a state-wide system for would be welcome.

Responses to questions in the LD1967 DRAFT document.
1. How might an energy coaching program successfully reach low- and moderate-income and rural households in Maine?

Building good relationships with other service organizations that have a longer history of trust building will be important, as well as recruitment of coaches who are close to that community.

2. How might a Maine energy coaching pilot program measure success?

Data collection as described above is very challenging. Using data from EMT by region, EV registrations, Window Dressers, utilities on solar installations may provide data in the shorter term.

SAMPLE REPORT

BROOKLIN CLIMATE RESPONSE COMMITTEE

Helping Brooklin, Maine Transition to Energy Efficiency and Climate Resilience

October 10, 2025

Name & Address removed for privacy purposes.

Dear P____ & D____,

Thank you for inviting members of our committee into your home on October 9 for a Neighbor-to-Neighbor Home Visit. Here is our report from that visit, as well as a comprehensive resource document to help you find vendors and take advantage of state and federal incentives.

In the following pages, you will find our observations about how you can make your home more comfortable, efficient, economical, and environmentally sustainable. We truly believe that today's technological advances make it possible to eliminate most, if not all, of your fossil fuel and utility bills!

WE'RE HERE TO HELP! We want you to know that the Brooklin Climate Response Committee is here to help you in this transition. We can help you find the best rebates and apply for them, and help you line up installers. Efficiency upgrades are often best accomplished in a number of steps carried out over several years. We hope our visit and this report help you identify how to gain more efficiency, and please remember that we will also be here when you're ready for your next steps. New technologies, rebates and tax incentives are popping up daily, and we will do our best to keep up with them.

Again, we want to thank you for participating in our program. If you need clarification on anything in our report, want further information, or have feedback on how we can improve our program, please get in touch. And if you find that this service has helped you, please recommend us to your Brooklin friends. We are looking forward to helping our neighbors live in healthier, more efficient homes and move our town towards a more resilient future.

Best wishes,
The Brooklin Climate Response Committee

Si Balch – Corrinne Collett – Steve Hindy, -- Doug Hylan (Chair) – David Porter – Catherine Princell -- Karl Schoettle – Lars Selberg

BROOKLIN CLIMATE RESPONSE HOME VISIT REPORT

A PATH TOWARDS ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

1) FIRST -- QUICK & INEXPENSIVE WAYS TO GET STARTED

LIGHT WITH LEDs – LED light bulbs use only about 10% as much electricity as incandescent bulbs, and about half as much as fluorescents. In most fixtures, you can change them yourself.

- **What we saw**: You told us that most of the fixtures in your home use LEDs – *that's great!* Switching any remaining bulbs to LEDSs will save money and provide longer-lasting bulbs. LEDs come in all shapes, sizes and colors. If you want warm light, similar to the standard color of incandescent bulbs, look for bulbs with a warm temperature (2700-3000K). Be sure to bring any discarded fluorescent bulbs to the hazardous waste drop off at the Blue Hill transfer station as they contain a small amount of toxic mercury.

REDUCE HEAT LOSS THROUGH WINDOWS – New, high efficiency windows are very expensive. As a much cheaper alternative, insulating window inserts, such as those from WindowDressers.org, can make a home more comfortable and easier to heat. In an older home with leaky single glazed windows, they can pay for themselves in as little as one year. WindowDresser inserts can reduce the heat lost through even the best windows by half!

- **What we saw**: Most of your windows appear to be relatively new, double glazed units with good weather stripping
- **Our recommendation**: Even though you only heat your house to a low level in the coldest months, we believe you would benefit from getting some window inserts for windows that face north or are older leaky units. Go to WindowDresser.org soon to sign up to have your windows measured. It is probably too late to join this year's cohort of insert builders, but it's worth considering for next year.

DRY YOUR CLOTHES FOR FREE – Most clothes dryers use a lot of energy. An outdoor clothesline saves money and gives fresher smelling laundry. An indoor drying rack can serve on rainy or very cold days.

- **What we saw:** You showed us your very interesting Bosch 500 series heat pump clothes drier. *Thanks – we've not seen that model before and can add it to our recommendations in the future.*
- **Our recommendation:** A clothesline is a type of pollution free solar power! Once your construction is finished, we hope you might consider adding one.

2) SECOND -- MAJOR SAVINGS WITH LOTS OF INCENTIVES

INSULATION AND AIR SEALING MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE – The key to low energy bills is a tight and well insulated house. Efficiency Maine offers impressive rebates to help you with air sealing and insulation improvements when they are made by one of the Efficiency Maine registered installers. Each insulation project with an Efficiency Maine registered vendor comes with a free blower door test, checking before and after results. The most complete results will come with a full energy audit, but substantial improvements can be made with a modest outlay.

- **What we saw:** You told us of the up-to-date insulation plan for your new addition. We discussed adding insulation board to the inside of the rafters to provide an extra thermal break. The attic of the original house has 6" of fiberglass batts between the ceiling joists. There is no insulation in the cellar.
- **Our recommendation**: You would benefit from some additional attic insulation, which should be a relatively easy job as the area is small and rafter mate ventilators are already installed. Sprayed foam in the rim joist area of you cellar would also be fairly easy and would offer a rapid payback. Ask for quotes from at least two Efficiency Maine registered insulation installers listed on our resource sheets. They can propose an insulation plan designed to make maximum use of Efficiency Maine's incentives.
- EcoHome Genius has a listing of attic ladder insulation tents that are inexpensive, simple to install, and quite effective

HEAT PUMPS FOR CLEAN, QUIET AND EFFICIENT WARMTH – Heat pumps warm you by concentrating heat from outside air and moving it into your home, a process that is much more efficient than burning fuels. And they can cool your home more efficiently than window air conditioners on hot summer days. The cost is discounted by Efficiency Maine rebates. Rest assured that any heat pump that qualifies for one of their rebates we work well in our cold climate.

- **What we saw:** You use a propane instantaneous hot water system for your primary heating in the original home. The boiler uses condensing technology, meaning it is quite efficient You told us you plan to use heat pumps in the new addition.
- **Our recommendation**: The original layout has been opened up, making it more suitable for a heat pump than many older homes. A heat pump in this section would offer reduced heating costs in the winter and air conditioning during our increasingly warm summers.

HEAT PUMP HOT WATER HEATERS CAN REALLY SAVE – Domestic hot water can be the second biggest energy user in many homes. Heat pump water heaters are less expensive to operate than other types and typically come with a 10 warrantee. There are substantial discounts available at many

retailers. They have the added benefit of helping dehumidify your basement. Depending on your water usage and your current water heater type, they can often pay for themselves in a single year.

- **What we saw:** Your instantaneous propane boiler provides your domestic hot water, an efficient system.
- **Our recommendation:** A heat pump water heater would fit in your cellar, and give a slight improvement in domestic hot water heating costs. The dehumidification benefit might be enough to justify this investment. Efficiency Maine has a terrific incentive that makes a heat pump water heater the least expensive to purchase. Unfortunately it expires on 10/31, but if you are in Maine before then you can pick one up at Lowe's, Selco, or Home Depot with discounts applied at checkout. It would also be eligble for a renewable energy tax credit, which expires on 12/31/25.

3) THIRD -- BIGGER INVESTMENTS THAT PAY OFF BIG

GET YOUR ELECTRICITY FROM THE SUN – Prices for photovoltaic panels have fallen so low that generating your own solar electricity is substantially cheaper than standard offer utility rates. If you can install an array at your home – either on a rooftop or on the ground – you could have free electricity for twenty years after an 8 to 10 year payback period. If your home site does not offer good solar options, there are other ways to get clean renewable electricity.

- **What we saw**: We were glad to hear you express interest in using clean renewable solar energy. You have appropriate roof space for a rooftop system, the least expensive type of personal photovoltaics. Unfortunately, federal tax incentives for solar (and almost all renewable and efficiency improvements) will be removed after the end of this year. Solar still offers financial advantages, just not quite as great as those possible when tax incentives were in place.

  We discussed that Maine's current net energy billing policy is very advantageous, allowing solar credits to be apportioned between several accounts within the Versant Bangor Hydro territory. We think that Versant Power would grant an interconnection agreement, although some persistence may be required on the part of your installer.

  When planning for a personal solar array, it's important to try to design it for not just your current electrical use, but for additions you may make in the near future. Heating, air conditioning, and transportation are usually our biggest energy uses – plan ahead to save money on these with you solar array.

  If you are interested in pursuing personal solar in the future, we are happy to meet again to talk about these options in more detail, and walk through some next steps.

  In the short term, you might consider signing up with a community solar farm, such as those offered by NexAmp or Ampion. While the cost savings from community solar farms are modest (generally only 15% with no protection against future utility hikes) they require no

upfront cost, and you can back out at any time with no penalty. Learn more from the Maine Public Advocate.

AN EV IS THE CAR OF THE FUTURE – The total cost of ownership of an electric vehicle is already lower than that of an internal combustion powered one. Reduced maintenance and much lower fuel costs mean that you will start seeing a lot more EVs on the road. Even with our current fossil fuel powered electrical grid, an EV can substantially lower your greenhouse gas footprint. If renewable energy is used, your driving can be virtually carbon free. When thinking about an EV, remember that for most owners, almost all charging takes place at home. Public charging is usually only necessary on a long trip.

- **What we saw:** You told us that you are interested in purchasing an EV the next time you are in the car market. *That's great!* A plug-in hybrid could reduce your fuel costs by nearly 50%, and a battery electric by even more.
- **Our recommendation:** More EV models are coming on the market, and there are lots of good choices. Used EVs are coming on the market and often sell at attractive prices – if you are a two car family, a good way to get started can be to purchase a used EV. It may have less range than the newer models, but can do all your local trips, saving your gasoline car for road trips. Five of our committee members now drive EVs and would be happy to answer your questions about options and home charger installation. Even offer you some test drives!

FOURTH -- PLANNING AHEAD

DON'T LET AN UNDERSIZED ELECTRICAL SERVICE ENTRY HINDER FUTURE SAVINGS – Soon, almost all your home energy needs will be supplied more cheaply and cleanly by electricity than by fossil fuels. As you cut down on your fossil fuel usage, your electrical consumption will naturally rise. Some older homes still have undersized service entries that will need to be upgraded in order to take full advantage of the cleaner, more efficient future we all want.

- **What we saw:** You showed us a 100 amp service entry, but explained that you intend to upgrade it to 200 amps soon. That will be enough to power a fully electric home, including heat pumps, electric cooking range and an EV charger.

AS YOUR APPLIANCES AGE, BE READY WITH AN EFFICIENT REPLACEMENT – Sometimes when an old appliance suddenly stops working, we rush out and buy the quickest replacement without regard to its future energy usage. Avoid panic mode – Brooklin Climate Response can help you with choosing and locating high efficiency appliance models that can save you money and reduce emissions in the years ahead.

- **What we saw**: You use a propane gas cooking range. You told us you would consider an induction range in the future.
- **Our recommendation:** We discussed the VOC emissions that are inherent in gas cooking. We hope you will start turning on your stove hood before lightiing, and for the first minute of burner operation. Induction stoves produce no indoor pollutants, cook with the speed of a gas range, and are much easier to clean. You'll need to use pots and pans that are magnetic – if a magnet sticks to the bottom, you're all set. If you are interested in trying out induction cooking, please let us know – we can loan you a single burner induction cooktop to experiment with. Several members of our committee have induction ranges, and would be happy to demonstrate theirs.

DON'T FORGET YOUR YARD MACHINES – The two and four stroke combustion engines that power most of our yard equipment are some of the noisiest, least efficient and most polluting machines in our lives. Now there are battery powered lawnmowers, snowblowers, string trimmers, chainsaws and leaf blowers that are powerful, safer and quieter.

- **Our recommendation:** When you are in the market for a new yard machine, be sure to check if there is a battery-powered alternative.

NOTES: You mentioned that you were considering a propane backup generator. Although these have been considered de rigueur in this part of Versant territory in the past, we try to discourage them going forward for several reasons. First, they are expensive, both to install and to maintain. They produce an inordinate amount of air and noise pollution, both during outages and during their frequent "exercise runs". They tend to be a fire hazard, and the tank of gas complicates the firefighter's job. Finally, Versant power has been doing a lot of overdue work on their peninsula distribution system to increase reliability.

Instead, we hope you will consider the advantages of a backup battery system:

1. A battery produces no on-site air and noise pollution.
2. Their maintenance and operating costs are much lower and they produce better quality electricity than many propane generators.
3. If you install a solar array, a battery will allow you to use power from your array during an outage, which can substantially increase the effective capacity of a modestly sized battery.
4. In the near future, as our utilities struggle to install sufficient infrastructure to cope with increasing demand, backup batteries will become increasingly valuable assets in managing peak load periods, generating income for their owners and lowering electric rates for everyone.

5. Finally, as the dire effects of global warming accelerate, government policies may change to discourage the use of fossil fuels by making them more expensive. Any fossil fuel appliances you purchase now may be obsolete well before their normal lifetime.

CONCLUSIONS:

As you are currently heating your home during the winter, even to a low level, we think that it is worth focusing on improvements to your home's envelope through adding insulation in your attic and the rim joist area of your cellar, and tightening up the air sealing around your attic drop-ladder. In the future, adding some Window Dresser inserts will help lower the impact of winter heating.

In spite of the common perception that a house must be heated to a low level through the winter, many seasonal historic buildings avoid winter heating to help preserve structure, valuable antique furniture, and irreplaceable original wall coverings. The key is to provide ample ventilation to avoid condensation, and its attendant mildew. There are excellent and inexpensive ventilation systems available to address moisture problems in unheated houses. If you would like to consider this option, please get in touch and we'll help you with planning.

THANK YOU!

P___ & D___, we enjoyed meeting with you and exploring ways to make your Brooklin home more efficient. We hope you found our home visit helpful – if so, please help us spread the word about our program. And don't hesitate to contact us with any further questions or suggestions for improvements to our program.

Sincerely,

Doug Hylan, Jerry Wetterskog and Emma Weed
Brooklin Climate Response Committee Neighbor to Neighbor Energy Coaches Team

Response received in reaction to this report

Doug at al.,

Thank you for meeting with us, and for providing this professional report. We have reviewed it and there are great insights and observations! We will work to include all recommendations into our build.

We sincerely thank you all for taking the time to meet with us!

D___ and P____

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Karen Robbins

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

While reviewing the draft, I thought the metrics on page 9 could be made more complete.

For Maine Regional Energy Coach Pilot Program (Proposal 1) add kWhrs, BTU's, or therms reduced/household and carbon footprint reduction/household.
For Climate Corps Pilot Program (Proposal 2) add kWhrs, BTU's, or therms reduced/household and carbon footprint/household reduction.
For the Resource Hub Pilot Program (Proposal 3) add the number of trainees, further add the number of people trained by those trainers, and link to households engaged per trainer to demonstrate leveraged advantage of training trainers.

Respectfully,
Karen Robbins
--
Karen M. Robbins
Managing Member
KM Robbins Construction LLC

CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

SUSTAINABILITY OFFICE

JULIE A. ROSENBACH
Sustainability Director

Date: January 22, 2026

To: Maine Department of Energy Resources (DOER) and Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF)

RE: Comments on the draft report outlining potential design options for home energy navigator and coaching pilot programs for Maine

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed options for helping Maine households navigate energy efficiency and clean energy home improvements.

The City of South Portland has successfully implemented several programs to help low- and moderate-income residents adopt more sustainable practices and improve their lives using volunteers, incentives, and home-based assistance. Through our annual Resilient Yards program (2023–present), we have trained and managed 65 volunteer coaches that have helped 230 residents throughout the city learn about, plan for, and plant native pollinator gardens in their yards. Through our Electrify Everything program (2022-2023), we provided $262,000 in rebates to 317 low- and moderate-income South Portland residents for electric vehicles, electric lawn care equipment, e-bikes, heating and cooling systems, and home weatherization.

Building on lessons learned through implementation of these programs, South Portland has spent the last year developing a framework for a new Home Energy Program that will include three core components: 1) energy literacy, 2) basic weatherization services, and 3) a simple, customized home energy plan. We have applied for funding and hope to implement the program beginning in summer 2026. If funded, staff in South Portland's Sustainability Office will work with an energy audit consultant and selected low- to moderate-income households to implement the program. Note that our proposed model does not include the use of volunteers.

With this experience, we offer the following comments:

1. ***Whatever statewide model is eventually adopted, Maine first needs a central hub for resources and training [Proposal 3] as the foundation for meeting state and local residential energy goals.*** Momentum is growing for home energy programs across Maine because energy affordability is a pressing problem. As you know, a 2024 study commissioned by the Maine Electric Ratepayer Advisory Council found that low-income households are facing home energy burdens of nearly 14% of household income, and moderate-income households experience energy affordability gaps of nearly $700 per year. The home energy affordability gap more than doubled between 2020-2022, with

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further increases anticipated. *A key conclusion of the report is the need for enhanced education programs to help Mainers understand options for improving energy efficiency in their homes*. The analysis states that weatherization can reduce energy burden by up to $400 per year and efficiency upgrades can provide up to an additional $1,000 reduction in energy costs.

To build residents' capacity for making energy upgrades, the first key element for a home energy program is energy literacy. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, energy literacy programs can encourage people to improve their home's efficiency. In the context of homes, energy literacy refers to the practical ability to interpret utility data, understand home energy systems, and manage household consumption to save money and reduce waste. This is particularly important in Maine, where energy bills are complex, including varied rate structures and charges making it hard for households to see where their costs come from and how they can influence these costs.

Standardized, coordinated resources and training would build a foundation for South Portland – and any community wishing to start a home energy program – saving time and money. It would also ensure information is current and consistent.

2. ***For the broadest reach and impact, home energy programs need to be adaptable and locally specific.*** Data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that 23% of homes in Maine were built before 1940, nearly double the national average. These homes, built before modern energy codes were implemented, frequently have poor insulation, leaky windows, unsealed ducts, minimal insulation, and inefficient heating systems, all of which add up to high energy costs. We know that while many residents may understand that their homes are energy inefficient, they may not know how to pinpoint what improvements are needed or how to prioritize them. Thus, the *need* for home energy programs is similar across the state.

   However, home energy programs should be local whenever possible. A Climate to Thrive (ACTT) has been facilitating dialogue and learning among communities with home energy programs and communities seeking to develop programs. What I have taken away from these meetings is that each community has their own character or culture. In smaller communities, programs can be more organic and a volunteer-based model can work well. Some communities join together and work with their regional planning organization to coordinate efforts. In larger communities, using City staff may be the most effective and easiest approach.

   Overall, while there are fundamental similarities that run through each program, there are many different ways the programs can be *delivered*. Building relationships with residents is another key element for any home energy program to be successful. Bringing information to people in their homes, about their homes, and helping them

understand it and navigate through it takes time and multiple touch points. Building and reinforcing the community partnerships needed to reach low- and moderate-income households also requires extensive time. In our view, regional coordinators would be spread too thin.

3. ***Instead of developing a new framework, wrap the pilot program into the Community Resilience Partnership.*** There are currently 263 communities and 24 service provider organizations participating in the partnership across Maine. The state should use existing Community Action Grants as a funding pathway to encourage the broad adoption of home energy programs that can be adaptable to each community's needs. The CRP already has a well-designed and accessible application and reporting process. Pairing state-generated, standardized materials [Proposal 3] with funding through CAGs would effectively enable communities to implement a home energy program tailored to their community.

   If the state chooses this option, it should consider allocating additional funding to the CRP and issueing a special round of CAG funding reserved for home energy programs. This way, it would not compete with other municipal climate action priorities. Recognizing that home energy programs are a highly cost effective climate action, the amount of funding may be less than regular cycles, for example up to $25k for a single community and $75k for multiple communities or regional planning organizations.

4. ***Incentives for energy efficiency and clean energy upgrades should be reevaluated to meet the needs of households with the greatest needs.*** The most significant barrier to homeowners making home energy upgrades is project costs, meaning that home energy programs are most effective when they are paired with incentives that enable homeowners to make needed investments. Incentives should be broadened to assist households that may not be able to access other income-eligible energy programs such as HEAP and LIAP. For example, households earning between 60-80% of the state medium income may experience a "benefits cliff" whereby they may not qualify for assistance, but still encounter unaffordable energy costs.

   To accomplish this, the definitions of low- and moderate-income should align with current state socioeconomic data. When defining income eligibility, ***the state should switch to the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) income threshold developed by the United Way*** because it provides a more realistic definition of moderate income. Homeowners in the ALICE category may technically fall above current moderate income thresholds yet still lack the financial resources necessary to make significant home energy investments. Using this metric would improve program equity and ensure assistance reaches households with genuine financial need.

CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

SUSTAINABILITY OFFICE

JULIE A. ROSENBACH
Sustainability Director

In addition, ***financial incentives should be re-evaluated to align with current project costs***. The gap between project costs and available incentives is often too wide for low- or moderate-income homeowners to follow through with upgrades. The State should evaluate current incentive levels and adjust them to align with realistic spending capacity of low- and moderate-income homeowners.

5. In our experience, ***the most successful way to reach low- and moderate-income households in Maine is through building connections with local organizations***. Outreach and engagement for South Portland's program will be multi-pronged, and build on established local partnerships. Outreach is envisioned to include the creation of a webpage, installation of lawn signs and fliers at critical locations throughout the City, and distribution of digital and print advertisements, home mailers, and electronic newsletters. The City will partner with relevant departments and organizations such as General Assistance, the Opportunity Alliance, and Age Friendly South Portland to directly reach low- and moderate-income homeowners.

6. In order ***to measure success, program outcomes and impacts should be scaffolded***. Immediate program outcomes may include tracking community engagement and interest in the program, number of program participants, and increased knowledge and confidence of participants to make energy-saving decisions. These outcome should be tracked at the community level.

   It would be pragmatic to capture medium-term outcomes after one year, such as the percentage of participants that have taken at least one action to reduce their energy consumption, energy savings, improvements in home comfort, adoption of energy-efficient equipment and/or technologies, cost of the upgrades, and overall cost savings. This could be captured through a standard survey created at the state-level and administered at the community level.

   The state should also track home energy program impacts overall such as reduced energy burden for low- and moderate-income residents and reduced climate impact attributable to the program.

Sincerely,

Julie Rosenbach

Julie Rosenbach
Sustainability Director
City of South Portland

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To: Sy Coffey
Maine Department of Energy Resources
Maine Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future

From: Karina Graeter
Sustainability Division Director
Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission

Date: January 22, 2026

RE: Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in the State of Maine

On behalf of the Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission (SMPDC) and the Southern Maine Energy Navigator Pilot (SMENP), thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on DOER's proposed energy coach pilot program designs. We appreciate the State of Maine's continued focus on advancing equitable, community-based approaches to improving residential energy efficiency.

Background

The Southern Maine Energy Navigator Pilot (SMENP), launched in May 2025 to provide technical and financial support to homeowners in Kittery, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, Ogunquit and Wells completing home energy upgrades. The focus of the pilot is to support community members who are currently underserved by existing home energy programs and incentives, in particular low- and moderate-income households. Our comments and recommendations reflect the SMENP team's experience with conceptualizing and implementing a regional energy coaching program.

Proposed Program Structures

Maine Regional Energy Coach Pilot Program

1. ***Dedicated program coordinators or full-time staff are critical to program success.*** Through our pilot, we have found that full-time staff, and staffing consistency, helps to build and retain institutional knowledge. It allows the program to build working relationships with municipal staff, local contractors and other organizations providing assistance. Full-time staff are also able to provide long-term strategic planning that centers the specific energy and equity goals of each community. In contrast, programs that rely primarily on volunteers often face challenges related to volunteer retention and limited availability. Relying on paid staff who serve longer terms helps mitigate

these challenges and ensures that homeowners have reliable, consistent access to their assigned coach.

2. ***Pilot programs benefit from interconnection with other organizations and institutions that provide energy assistance.*** Ensuring that energy coaching programs are aware of the work being done from the local to state level, allows coaches to better connect residents with the necessary support, and continue to improve their program design. The program should be designed to create opportunities for pilots to engage directly with state agencies such as Efficiency Maine and Maine Housing as well as regional Community Action Program agencies and local nonprofit assistance organizations. Additionally, we recommend creating opportunities for peer-to-peer learning across the various regional programs. This could include hosting quarterly or semiannual meetings for staff to engage in professional development, and sharing lessons learned.

3. ***Communities should have the option to decide if Track 1 or Track 2 funding works best for their community and staff capacity.*** Community needs, geography, and existing capacity vary widely across the state. Not allowing towns to select which funding track works best for their needs may limit effective program design. Larger or more resourced communities may have established energy coaching programs and clustered populations that can successfully integrate volunteer-based models. However, rural or geographically dispersed communities may face challenges with volunteer recruitment or travel that may require alternative approaches, such as a full-time energy coach. The current framework would not allow organizations located in a region with existing programs to propose staffing models outside the volunteer-based approach. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity around how "regions" will be defined. Clearer definitions and greater flexibility would help ensure that qualified applicants are not excluded from proposing program structures that best meet local needs.

Climate Corps Pilot Program

1. ***An 11- or 22-month fellowship term will not allow sufficient time for fellows to develop the foundational energy efficiency and building science expertise required for effective program delivery.*** There is a significant learning curve, particularly for recent graduates, not only in acquiring technical knowledge but also in building the confidence and professional judgment needed to provide one-on-one guidance to homeowners. In our experience, fellows have expressed discomfort making recommendations to clients without substantial training and ongoing support, which limits their ability to operate independently within a short fellowship timeframe. If fellows are facilitated through programs such as AmeriCorps, shifts in the federal funding landscape could impede the

success and continuity of the pilot. Additionally, the relatively low wages associated with AmeriCorps fellowships may limit the ability to attract or retain individuals with the technical expertise necessary to effectively guide residents through complex energy efficiency and electrification upgrades.

2. ***There are safety and efficiency concerns with having individual Climate Corps fellows serve communities.*** Our pilot serves five towns, and we have found that to be a wide enough geographic area to generate enough clients for a full-time Energy Navigator. Therefore, we recommend that coaches be assigned to more than one community, especially if the population is 5,000 residents or lower. Our program has also found it beneficial to have two Energy Navigators as they are able to collaborate and problem solve difficult cases. If the pilot requires coaches to enter homes to provide real-time recommendations, it is best practice to have coaches go in pairs. This means having individual energy coaches raises liability and safety issues.

3. ***Fellows could be paired with full-time staff, as outlined in Proposal #1, to allow for knowledge and skill development.*** This staffing structure balances the long-term expertise and institutional knowledge of paid coordinators with the energy and capacity of fellows. It also alleviates the risks associated with relying primarily on short-term or volunteer positions. Our program provides a clear example of the effectiveness of this model. Due to an unanticipated delay in grant funding, we were able to retain a former AmeriCorps member in a full-time position, after their service term ended. This continuity allowed the fellow to deepen their technical expertise, strengthen relationships with partners and homeowners, and provide support to the incoming AmeriCorps fellow. As a result, the incoming fellow was better supported in their work, more confident in their interactions with clients, and able to contribute productively without being expected to operate independently. We strongly recommend this paired staffing approach as a proven and scalable model that strengthens programmatic outcomes while still incorporating fellows in a supportive and cost-effective manner.

Resource Hub Pilot Program

1. ***The SMENP team recommends removing this proposal from the overall report as it does not adequately address equity concerns and overlaps with existing resources and initiatives.*** This approach relies on organizations to have funding and staff or volunteer capacity available to utilize the resource hub to establish an energy coach program. This could exacerbate the existing inequities in which only better resourced communities are able to develop coach programs. Additionally, in the SMENP program's experience, many organizations are already engaging in this work informally through peer-to-peer

and organization-to-organization learning. For example, A Climate to Thrive hosts a quarterly zoom call for energy coaching programs to share out resources to one another; and Rewiring America is working to establish a national resource hub for energy coaching.

Serving Low- and Moderate-Income Households

1. ***The most significant barrier to homeowners making home energy upgrades is project costs, therefore current financial incentives should be evaluated to ensure they align with current project costs.*** The gap between project costs and available incentives is often too wide for low- or moderate-income homeowners to follow through with upgrades. The Department of Energy Resources, in conjunction with Efficiency Maine, should evaluate current incentive levels and adjust them to align with realistic spending capacity of low- and moderate-income homeowners.

2. ***The definitions of low- and moderate-income should be redefined to ensure they track with current state socioeconomic data.*** When defining income eligibility, switching to the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) income threshold that United Way developed would provide a more realistic definition of moderate-income***.*** Homeowners in the ALICE category may technically fall above current moderate-income thresholds yet still lack the financial resources necessary to make significant home energy investments. Incorporating this data could improve program equity and ensure assistance reaches households with genuine financial need.

Measuring Success

1. ***Utilize applications that connect to smart meters and gather electrical usage data.*** For clients who are willing to opt in, this would allow for pre- and post-upgrade data to be compiled and used to determine savings over time. This could be used to create state level data about the impact of installing technologies such as heat pumps, or the increased efficiency of technologies when coupled with weatherization. However, we note that this approach may not fully capture energy or cost savings for households transitioning from fossil fuels to electric heat pumps, and complementary evaluation methods would be needed.

2. ***The dollar amount of rebates received by clients supported by an energy coach should be tracked as a performance metric.*** While the proposal outlines an interest in comparing the cost effectiveness of energy coaching to rebates, our program has found that these forms of support are most effective in unison. Coupling technical assistance, with financial support, is often the best approach to get a homeowner to complete a

residential energy upgrade. Tracking this metric, especially paired with demographic data, would also provide insight into whether current rebate structures are adequately supporting low- and moderate-income homeowners.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important work. SMPDC and the Southern Maine Energy Navigator program look forward to continued collaboration with the State of Maine to advance accessible, community-driven energy solutions.

Sincerely,

Karina Graeter

Karina Graeter
SMPDC Sustainability Division Director

Comments on the Draft Creation of a Pilot Energy Coaching Program in the State of Maine

Submitted by Eloise Vitelli, Arrowsic, ME

As a former member of the EUT committee and the Select Committee on Housing, and a current member of the Electric Rate Affordability Council, I was pleased to see the draft report on energy coaching as required by LD 1967. Maine policy makers have worked hard over many years to address the energy needs of our residents and to ensure that energy efficiency resources are available to everyone regardless of where they live and what their income is. The deployment of energy coaches is another tool in the tool kit to meet that goal.

I offer the following comments on the three project designs:

My first concern applies to all three and the overall purpose of providing energy-coaching services to residential consumers, particularly low-to-moderate income households. Will energy coaches, and the technical assistance and educational materials, be targeted to work with families who are renters, whether in a stand-alone house, an apartment, or mobile home, as well as home-owners?

The Housing Committee grappled with the barriers/challenges faced by renters who may wish to weatherize or adopt more efficient energy or heating systems, for example, when they are often not in a position to make those kinds of decisions. While some of the assistance programs available (LIHEAP) can benefit renters, others – installing heat pumps for example, would need the blessing of the landlord, and which, if undertaken as a way of reducing energy costs, may conversely serve to increase rent. Perhaps some of the existing energy coaching programs have figured out how to work effectively with both homeowners and renters. Training and targeted outreach materials and strategies may be needed to engage the cooperation of both property owners and renters.

In terms of the three separate proposals, funding constraints seem to define and set the scope for the three program designs and therefore set the limits of their potential effectiveness. Nonetheless, Proposal 3 sets out what I believe is an appropriate role for the DOER to provide state-wide coordination, training, resources, monitoring and evaluation. A robust resource hub can serve to centralize a knowledge base and provide consistency in energy coaching activity within diverse communities.

Proposal 2 appears to utilize both paid and volunteer coaches, supported by Volunteer Maine and Climate Corps. It makes good sense to build on existing organizations and leverage their local knowledge and experience. Well-coordinated and trained volunteers

with on-the-ground familiarity can expand the reach of energy coaching. However, this design seems to leave out some communities not deemed to be 'very rural'. (Sagadahoc County for example)

The strength of the approach in Proposal 1, in addition to being statewide, is that it is designed "to ensure that the entity best positioned to fill this role in each region is eligible to apply". This program design takes the strength of the second proposal - incorporating local knowledge and experience - and combines that with the coordination and oversight role of the third proposal to deliver a statewide but locally delivered program. This approach to energy coaching offers a design that will best meet the goal of disseminating know-how and access to energy efficiency throughout the state.

Until sufficient funding is identified for a statewide design (Proposal 1), building capacity at the state level through an on-line resource-hub, providing training and technical assistance to existing programs, monitoring progress through the use of consistent outcome measures, and continuing to identify gaps and opportunities for collaboration can get the ball rolling while enabling existing energy coaching programs to expand their reach and effectiveness.

Finally, as state and local programs deliver energy coaching, it will be important to remember that reducing the cost of energy to consumers – homeowners and renters alike, is the ultimate measure of success. In the short run, energy coaching can connect more households, especially low to moderate income households, to resources that can make energy more affordable and, importantly, assist them in taking steps towards greater energy efficiency in the future.

An energy coaching program that fosters greater energy efficiency can help Maine people live more comfortably and affordably in their homes. [1] The transition to more efficient energy use will benefit us all – improved housing stock and overall lower energy costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

[1] The study done for the Maine Climate Council (Amplifying Voices: Engaging Diverse Populations in the Maine Climate Plan Update, December 2024) provides valuable insight into the critical connection between housing and energy costs.

Comments submitted via electronic mail by David von Seggern

To:	Coffey, Sy
Subject:	LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment
Attachments:	Rewiring_America_electrification_coaching.pdf

Hello,

I read the draft report on electric coaching programs because I am interested in this role myself. I have no particular comments on the draft other than supporting the concept of an electrification coaching program in Maine that will be geared closely to the needs of Mainers. I have fully electrified my home and car and feel fairly competent to take on a coaching role. I have already expressed interest in the training program offered by Rewiring America, and I have attached my most recent email from them. Perhaps it would be useful for you to contact them and examine their training program.

David von Seggern
Westbrook, ME

Comments submitted via electronic mail by Fred Weston

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: Energy Coach Draft

Hello

Wanted to make a comment per your invitation for public comment.

I have witnessed the good work that York ME's energy coaching program has done. I think this is a very good idea to spread State-wide. There is a lot of training involved to get coaches up to speed but well worth it.

Thank you
Fred Weston
York ME

Comments submitted via electronic mail by David Whitehouse

To: Coffey, Sy
Subject: LD 1967 Program Design Public Comment

Hello,

I appreciate the idea that there would be persons to help determine contractor recommendations. I also applaud and support the idea of energy coaches to assist in understanding and addressing barriers to energy efficient technology adoption, and the support in the uptake of available grants and other incentives. Thank you.

David Whitehouse - Stow, Maine

David Whitehouse
~d(-_-)b~