

Submitter: Melanie Plaut

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1143

Testimony in support of SB 1143 - March 19, 2025

Chair Sollman, Vice Chair Brock Smith and members of the Senate Committee on Energy and the Environment,

My name is Melanie Plaut. I am a retired OB/GYN living in NE Portland interested in innovative approaches to decarbonization.

It is not often that the legislature has the opportunity to pass a bill with so many positives.

As is being done in other states, SB 1143 would encourage the gas industry to pilot thermal energy network projects, a possible pathway for them to transition off of fossil fuels.

How do these work? for instance in Massachusetts the Eversource pilot is drilling a number bore-holes down the middle of the street to access the stable underground temperature which will serve approximately 140 homes with ground-source heat-pumps; this is more efficient than air-source heat pumps, which have to deal at times with very hot or very cold air. Also, they are able to take advantage of businesses which might need, for example, to chill a grocery freezer at the same time homes need heat - making this even more efficient since they can essentially trade heat.

A similar Washington bill, HB 2141 passed unanimously last year.

Here are some of the advantages:

1. Thermal energy networks utilize the expertise and work-force of the gas industry, and the trades.
2. These networks are a more promising direction for decarbonization than other proposed pathways for gas utilities to comply with Oregon law, which use fuels that are expensive and in short supply such as hydrogen and biomethane.
3. Networks which use shared ground-sourced temperature for heat pumps are an extremely efficient way to use electricity for heating and cooling, and may decrease the need for new transmission lines.
4. Decarbonizing a block or a neighborhood at a time can help solve the problem of lower-income households being unable to afford electrification, and being left behind with an increasingly expensive gas system.
5. And finally, this bill is supported by the trifecta of labor, industry, and climate

activists.

I encourage you to move this bill along; it's an easy win.

Melanie Plaut MD  
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