Testimony of Amy McLean

Connecticut Director and Senior Policy Advocate

Public Hearing, March 10, 2022

Acadia Center

Advancing the Clean Energy Future

Before the Housing Committee

Honorable Chairperson Lopes, Vice Chairpersons Smith and Anwar, Ranking Members Poletta and Cicarella and Committee Members:

Acadia Center appreciates this opportunity to provide written testimony. Acadia Center is a nonprofit research and advocacy organization committed to advancing the clean energy future. Acadia Center advocates for an equitable clean energy future for Connecticut, tackling regulatory and legislative energy policy, transportation, energy efficiency, beneficial electrification, utility innovation, and renewable energy.

Testimony in support of the following bill:

S.B. No. 292 An Act Concerning Heating Efficiency in New Residential Construction and Major Alterations of Residential Buildings

Acadia Center supports SB 292. Acadia Center understands that unless states implement new regulatory changes, electric and gas distribution system planning processes will not enable decarbonization at the scale needed to address the climate crisis. The northeast states have made important steps directionally consistent with addressing climate change, but the pace and scope of changes to date are inadequate to meet the mounting challenges. The recent acceleration of observable and predicted impacts of climate change, including storms with near-term impacts on human life and electric reliability, irreversible global changes, and disproportionate impacts on lower income communities, communities of color, and rural communities, require swift and sweeping reforms.1

About 80% of homes and 75% of commercial buildings in New England and New York rely on fossil fuels for heating, including heating oil, propane, and fossil gas.2 While fuel costs have been historically low in recent years, the average home in the Northeast spends roughly $1,000-$2,600 on heating every winter.3 Because the Northeast imports an overwhelming proportion of its fossil fuels, this money flows out of local economies to other states and countries, and the region is beholden to price fluctuations out of its control. Fossil fuel heating is also a leading contributor to climate change and poses health and safety dangers. One solution to these issues is switching to clean, efficient electric heat pumps. These commercially available heating systems can save residents money. Because they don't burn fossil fuels, they reduce health risks such as gas leaks or carbon monoxide poisoning, avoid fluctuating winter fuel costs, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Specifically in terms of this bill, Acadia Center supports transitioning away from fossil fuel combustion in our housing stock. We need to stop expanding our gas infrastructure if we are to meet our state's climate targets identified in the Global Warming Solutions Act Public Act 08-98 . The GWSA set goals of a 45% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and 80% by 2050. High efficiency all-electric construction generates much fewer emissions with our current electric grid, which will only get cleaner over time.

A recent study from RMI, a non-partisan, non- profit organization that works to transform global energy systems across the real economy, estimated that burning fossil fuels in buildings led to 318 additional deaths and $3.567 billion in health impact costs in 2017 in Connecticut alone.

As of right now, Maine is well on its way to meet its goal to install 100,000 heat pumps by 2025 and heat pumps are a proven and reliable technology being used in Canada. There is also demonstrated success for cost-effective all-electric residential construction in many parts of the country, including in the Northeast. Energize CT, our energy efficiency programs, recognize the benefits related to all-electric construction through its residential new construction and offer an incentives to ratepayers to achieve it. Presently, the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority provides additional points for all-electric affordable housing.

Lastly, Acadia Center supports the provision in the bill for the adoption of the 2024 International Energy Conservation Code as it will give the building industry adequate time to prepare for the changes. Additionally the workforce training in this bill is important because although many in the industry have already embraced all-electric construction, this training will help those that haven't had the bandwidth or means to make the transition.

This is a good first step to getting our housing going in the right direction, please support this important bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

For more information:

Amy McLean Connecticut Director and Senior Policy Advocate, amclean@acadiacenter.org, (860) 246-7121 ext.204, cell, 860 478-9125

1. See IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, Working Group I Report, Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis (Aug. 2021), available at https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/ (providing new estimates of the chances of crossing the global warming level of 1.5°C in the next decades, and finding that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach).

2 "Fossil gas" is used herein rather than "natural gas" to better reflect the harmful environmental attributes of this fuel. Fossil gas is distinct from delivered fuels, such as heating oil and propane that are also fossil fuels, because it reaches a building as a gas through pipes in a distribution system rather than being delivered as a liquid by truck.
3 Data for this report was drawn primarily from the U.S. Energy Information Agency, ISO New England, NY ISO, the U.S. Census American Community Survey, and state efficiency program data. A full citation of information sources is available at https://acadiacenter.org/document/clean-heating-pathways/.