

NEWS

Local advocates seek removal of Healey provision dealing with new nuclear facilities

by **Chris Larabee** Staff Writer
July 6, 2025



Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey Credit: NANCY LANE/BOSTON HERALD/TNS

Local advocates are urging the Legislature to remove a specific provision in Gov. Maura Healey's Energy Affordability, Independence & Innovation Act that would repeal a 1982 referendum requiring voters at a statewide election to approve any new nuclear facilities in Massachusetts.

The governor's massive energy legislative package, laid out in bill H.4144, seeks to reduce energy costs for residents and businesses through a variety of measures, including requiring the Department of Public Utilities to review and reform all charges on energy bills, establish a cap on month-to-month bill increases, allow Massachusetts to procure energy directly and reduce the value of net metering credits for new and large solar hookups, among other provisions.

In the valley, though, a group of advocates are urging legislators, through testimony at the State House, to remove a single line from the bill in Section 45, which would repeal Chapter 503 of the Acts of 1982. Chapter 503, approved by 67.5% of voters in the state in 1982, requires the Legislature to issue a report on a proposed nuclear power plant or low-level radioactive waste storage or disposal facility and the approval of voters at a statewide election before construction could begin.

"There's something for everyone in this bill and it's really good, but then she sneaks in the nuclear," said Deb Katz, a Rowe resident and member of the Citizens Awareness Network, which was created in 1991 by a group of concerned residents after lightning struck the Yankee Rowe nuclear facility. "That part is no good and they need to get it out."

In Healey's summary, she wrote the provision is an opportunity to create energy independence in Massachusetts by opening the door to new nuclear energy opportunities, which already require "rigorous federal, state, and local approvals through formal siting and licensing processes." The statewide ballot measure, Healey noted, is unique for nuclear energy and is a major limiting factor for the industry.

"No other generation source in the state requires this statewide ballot initiative approval. This Act would repeal a 1982 law that mandates that any new nuclear facility receive approval through a statewide ballot initiative, eliminating a major barrier to the consideration of new small modular reactors that could improve reliability, stabilize prices, and decarbonize the region's power grid," Healey's summary reads. "Since 2020, eight of the 14 states with a nuclear moratorium or similar provisions have either fully or partially lifted limitations on building new nuclear and three more states are exploring it."

Advocates, like Katz and Claire Chang, are also calling the proposed repeal an "affront to democracy," as they say the governor is trying to repeal a measure that was implemented through the will of the voters.

"The people voted overwhelmingly, 67%, for the referendum, which basically says the commonwealth needs to bring any new nuclear power before the citizenry and have them decide if they want new nuclear power or not," Chang said. "There's no reason to abrogate this, it's fairly won."

Hampshire and Franklin County voters also overwhelmingly approved the 1982 referendum, with about 67% in each county voting in favor of it, according to historical results from the Secretary of State's office.

“This is a meltdown of democracy,” Katz added.

Currently, there is only one nuclear power plant — the Seabrook Nuclear Power Station in Seabrook, New Hampshire — that could impact parts of Massachusetts if there were an emergency. The Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station in Plymouth ceased operations in 2019 and is currently being decommissioned. In and around Franklin County, the Yankee plant in Rowe was decommissioned in 2007 and the Vermont Yankee plant in Vernon, Vermont, was closed in 2014 and is currently being demolished, with its reactor building currently coming down, according to the Brattleboro Reformer.

Chang, a partner with Greenfield Solar, said there are far better options for renewable energy than nuclear power, including solar and wind energy, which carry far less risks. The small modular reactors mentioned in Healey’s bill summary, Chang added, are “enormous units” and only a few could even be placed at the existing nuclear sites.

“There is no chance these are going anywhere in Massachusetts and we need to look at truly renewable energy sources, even though the federal government is trying its best to cancel [tax credits],” Chang said. “It means we need to step up and make these projects financially viable.”

While testimony was taken on June 25 during a Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy hearing, written testimony was accepted until July 2. The deadline for the bill to be reported on is Aug. 24. The full text of Healey’s bill, H.4144, can be found here: bit.ly/4eGJHTJ.

Chris Lisinski of the State House News Service contributed to this report.

Chris Larabee can be reached at clarabee@recorder.com.