

Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee
LD 596 Resolve, to Provide Legislative Approval of Northern Maine Transmission Infrastructure
Testimony provided by Joshua Abram Kerckmar, Unity, Maine (Mar. 11, 2025)

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology:

My name is Josh Kerckmar, and I write against LD 596. I am an environmental historian whose home town, Unity, was slated to host the last pre-approved transmission project, the “Aroostook Renewable Gateway.”

LD 596 embodies the belief that the best way to accomplish something is to remove all obstacles to it. This belief would be amusing if it were not so disastrous in practice. A person who wants to build a house does not begin by abolishing architecture. A poet does not improve the composition of a sonnet by declaring that rhyme is tyranny. And yet, with LD 596, we are invited to believe that the best way to build transmission infrastructure is to remove the very legislative oversight that ensures it is built well.

As a progressive, I do not oppose renewable energy. I do not necessarily oppose new transmission lines. In fact, I would argue that the surest way to prevent renewable energy generation and transmission is to charge forward without a map, only to discover, too late, that the road is impassable. Pre-approving any transmission route is not progress: it is an excellent way to ensure that no progress occurs at all.

We have already seen this principle in action. In 2023, LD 924 gave developers *carte blanche* to chart a course for the “Aroostook Renewable Gateway.” It looked like a good idea on paper. But the project then collapsed under the weight of financial miscalculation, grassroots opposition, and problems finding a viable route—proof, if any were needed, that what looks simple in theory is often impossible in practice. Had the developer been required to submit its plan to the legislature for a vote, as it should have, these fatal errors might have been caught early, and the project might not have short-circuited.

The proponents of LD 596 will say that streamlining the process makes success more likely. I say it makes failure more spectacular. They will say that developers must be unconstrained to do their work. I say that many people have tripped and fallen precisely because they were given free reign. The truth is that deliberation is not an obstacle to action—it is the foundation of it. There is no contradiction between building transmission lines and building them responsibly. The only contradiction is between those who believe that good infrastructure comes from planning and those who believe it comes from sheer momentum.

It is backward to suggest that a transmission route should be approved before we know whether it will cause environmental damage. The normal order of human reason suggests that we should consider consequences before making decisions rather than after. Again, the Aroostook Renewable Gateway proves the point. An [independent analysis](#) by the College of the Atlantic’s ArcGIS Lab found that a single 37-mile stretch of the proposed route—from Dixmont to Windsor—would have impacted 138 acres of wetlands, four acres of inland waterfowl habitat, 210 acres of critical deer wintering area, and, perhaps most concerning, around 87 acres that support species of special concern. One might think such details would be worth having the legislature consider before approving a project rather than discovering them after the fact.

LD 596 does not remove delays; it ensures them. It does not remove opposition; it provokes it. It does not guarantee progress; it undermines it.

Maine should build its energy future wisely, not blindly. The best way to ensure success is to demand accountability from the start, not after mistakes have been made. Reject LD 596, and let us proceed in ways that are not only swift but sound.

Respectfully,

Josh Kerksmar