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Additional Information regarding LD 186 – An Act to Clarify the Public Utilities Commission’s Authority to Establish Time-of-Use Pricing for Standard-Offer Service

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

Preserve Rural Maine had planned to attend the work session for LD 186, but unfortunately, we are unable to do so. We hope you will accept this supplemental information for your consideration during the work session.

While we do not oppose utilities offering an alternative Time-of-Use (TOU) pricing option in addition to the Standard Offer, we are concerned by the Public Utilities Commissioner's statements regarding opt-in options, which often result in low participation rates. The idea that this new TOU pricing could be opt-in for the first year, then mandatory, is troubling. If we have misunderstood the Commissioner's statements, we apologize, but this feels like a "bait and switch."

As we highlighted in our testimony opposing this bill, there are several groups of people for whom time-of-use rates can be particularly harmful.

Low-income households

- **Limited flexibility:** Low-income individuals and families often face financial constraints and may have less flexibility to change when they use energy. Their use of electricity may be driven more by necessity than by an ability to shift usage to off-peak times.
- **Inflexible work schedules:** Many low-income individuals work jobs with rigid schedules that may not allow for changing when they use electricity, like at night or during off-peak hours.

People with medical needs

- **Critical medical equipment:** Some individuals rely on electricity to power life-sustaining medical equipment (e.g., ventilators, oxygen machines, or refrigeration for medications). These needs cannot be shifted to off-peak times without risking health and safety.
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- **Health conditions requiring specific conditions:** People with chronic illnesses, such as those who require consistent heating, cooling, or air filtration, may not be able to adjust their electricity use.

Renters and apartment dwellers

- **Limited control over energy infrastructure:** Renters often do not have control over major home systems like heating, cooling, and appliances. In some cases, they may not have access to the flexibility of programmable thermostats or efficient appliances that could help manage energy consumption during off-peak hours.
- **Shared meters:** In multi-unit buildings, electricity may be metered collectively, and renters may have little control over how and when the building's systems use electricity.

People with non-traditional work hours

- **Shift workers:** Individuals who work night shifts, rotating shifts, or irregular hours may need to use electricity during peak times to maintain a comfortable living space when they are at home, making it hard for them to take advantage of lower rates during off-peak hours.
- **Caregivers:** Those who are responsible for children, elderly family members, or other dependents often have energy needs that align with their caregiving schedules, which may not coincide with off-peak times.

People living in areas with unreliable electricity

- **Frequent outages:** In regions where power outages or brownouts are common, people may not be able to control when and how they use electricity, as they may need to use it as it's available or during specific times when power is more stable.

Small business owners

- **Operating hours:** Many small businesses, especially those in retail or food service, operate during hours that overlap with peak times. Changing their energy consumption to off-peak periods could be impractical or impossible, as their operations are tied to customer demand.
- **Appliance-heavy businesses:** Businesses that rely heavily on energy-intensive equipment (e.g., restaurants, laundromats) may not have the option to shift their use to off-peak times without disrupting their operations.

Large families or households with specific routines

- **Inflexible routines:** Larger households or families with children may have consistent energy usage patterns based on school schedules, work hours, and shared activities that cannot easily be adjusted to match time-of-use rates.

People with older homes or inadequate insulation

- **Energy inefficiency:** Individuals living in homes that are poorly insulated or have outdated heating and cooling systems may need to run their systems more often, regardless of time-of-day, to maintain comfort, making it difficult to shift usage.

Seniors

- **Health and comfort needs:** Many seniors require consistent heating or cooling, especially those who use heat pumps, which have been widely adopted through efforts in beneficial electrification. These seniors depend on heat pumps for warmth during the colder months, and their health and safety may be compromised if they cannot maintain a comfortable temperature during peak hours when rates are higher.
- **Limited flexibility:** Seniors, particularly those on fixed incomes or with mobility issues, may not be able to adjust their energy usage to off-peak times, which could create financial or health difficulties.
- **Reliance on steady electricity:** Seniors may also rely on electricity for medical equipment or other health-related needs that cannot be postponed or shifted to off-peak hours.

For these groups, the ability to shift energy usage to off-peak times can be challenging due to financial constraints, medical requirements, lifestyle factors, or a lack of control over their living or working conditions. Time-of-use rates may benefit those who have more flexible schedules or can invest in energy-efficient technologies, but they can unintentionally place a burden on the groups listed above.

Thank you for considering this supplemental information.

Sincerely,

Tanya Blanchard
President
Preserve Rural Maine