

Testimony of Rene Augustus La Casse in Support of
LD 633: An Act Concerning the Restoration of Electricity During Emergencies for Certain Medically Vulnerable Individuals Who Rely on Electronic Medical Apparatuses

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and honorable members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee. I am Rene Augustus La Casse, and I am the Manager of Municipal Strategy and Policy Analyst at A Climate to Thrive. A Climate to Thrive is a community-driven non-profit that is working on a clean energy transition that prioritizes community benefits across Maine, with a particular focus on energy equity. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to support **LD 633: An Act Concerning the Restoration of Electricity During Emergencies for Certain Medically Vulnerable Individuals Who Rely on Electronic Medical Apparatuses**.

In my work, I speak with municipal leaders about resilience, and how they can best serve their residents and taxpayers in times of emergency. More often than not, we are able to use pre-existing resources to formulate a solution that will serve residents, but there are other times in which we recognize that our pre-existing resources are insufficient to serve residents, particularly in resilience events. When considering how best to care for residents who rely on essential medical apparatuses that are powered by electricity within the legacy grids that many of our towns rely on, and while facing increasingly long and frequent power outages, it is clear that we need new ideas and different actions.

While many Mainers see a long power outage as an inconvenience, there are those for whom it is truly an emergency, as they require electricity to power devices that keep them alive, and whose condition will deteriorate if they do not have access to electricity. Many don't have other places to go, and are left to remain in cold homes without the electricity that they depend on for survival.

Maine is not alone as it reckons with this national problem. Louisiana is a comparative case study for how increased length and frequency of power outages can impact residents. Both Maine and Louisiana have experienced a fifty percent increase in length of power outages, and lead their regions in highest average counts of eight-hour or longer outages with severe weather exacerbating circumstances in both. Finally, each state is facing increasingly strong storms with greater frequency. Hurricane Ida demonstrated the havoc that storms can have on those who rely on medical apparatuses. In Louisiana, twenty-one people died during Hurricane Ida because of a lack of electricity and access to lifesaving medical devices.

Although a Nor'easter has yet to have as tragic an impact reported in the news, it is clear that we need to reckon with these challenges and advocate for vulnerable Mainers. In 2022, the AP

covered a harrowing story of a blind cancer survivor in a retirement facility here. She had developed hypothermia and lived with residents who needed electricity for their oxygen, and “hoped like hell that the power would come back on”. I have also heard heartbreaking stories of parents with children who require medical apparatuses, waking up their child to ensure they are still breathing without their CPAP machine. This bill will ensure that our vulnerable neighbors know that we recognize that access to electricity can be the difference between life and death for people in our communities.

As I work in my community to ensure that people have places to go in times of emergency, I still recognize that this option is a luxury for those who can accept it, and not feasible for those who are homebound. I also see that generators can be inaccessible for many because of their cost. This means that, with increasingly severe storms and increasingly long power outages and response times, we need solutions for our most vulnerable that are equitable and understanding. I hope this honorable committee sees that this bill is an equitable solution for our most vulnerable Mainers, and supports the passage of **LD 633: An Act Concerning the Restoration of Electricity During Emergencies for Certain Medically Vulnerable Individuals Who Rely on Electronic Medical Apparatuses.**