



# Maine Conservation Voters

*Inform. Vote. Protect.*

## Testimony in Support of LD 995, An Act to Provide Low-income Electric Ratepayer Assistance

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Lucy Hochschartner, and I am the Climate and Clean Energy Director with Maine Conservation Voters (MCV). MCV represents over 14,000 members and supporters who are building a just, thriving future for all by acting on the climate crisis, protecting the environment, and safeguarding our democracy. I am here today to testify in support of LD 995, An Act to Provide Low-income Electric Ratepayer Assistance.

**Maine is in an electricity affordability crisis.** As this year's Electricity Ratepayer Advisory Council (ERAC) report makes clear, increased funding for low-income assistance programs is urgent. Low-income customers have an estimated electricity burden of 8%, more than double what is considered affordable.<sup>1</sup> In 2023 alone, Maine utilities sent out 440,000 disconnection notices.<sup>2</sup> These are people who the system has failed. Reporting just yesterday suggests 19,000 CMP customers are behind on their bills *right now*, while Versant did not say how many of their customers are in the same position.<sup>3</sup>

**This crisis has many causes.** In particular, Maine's price increases are largely due to our reliance on gas, which is subject to extreme price spikes in a global market.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, storm recovery costs are rising. This year, CMP ratepayers are being asked to cover \$228 million in storm recovery costs from 2024.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the current system creates large profits for monopoly utilities.

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<https://www.maine.gov/meopa/sites/maine.gov.meopa/files/inline-files/ERAC%20Report%20with%20Consultants%20Reports%20Embedded.pdf>

2

<https://www.maine.gov/meopa/about/news/maine-public-advocate-urges-low-income-electric-customers-see-help-bills>

3

<https://www.pressherald.com/2025/03/25/utilities-can-cut-off-power-to-mainers-with-unpaid-bills-starting-in-april/?copylink=true>

4

<https://www.maine.gov/energy/electricity-prices#:~:text=About%20half%20of%20all%20electricity,power%20generation%20and%20transmission%20system>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pressherald.com/2025/02/28/cmp-seeks-228-million-for-2024-storm-repair-costs/>

CMP and Versant, for instance, made more than \$200 million in profit in 2023.<sup>6 7</sup> They earned that profit as monopolies, not as companies competing in a market. New research from a former chief of corporate strategy at Sempra, a major gas utility, shows that nationally, electric and gas ratepayers are being overcharged tens of billions of dollars each year.<sup>8</sup> This is because the rates of return these utilities are being granted are far above their likely cost of capital.<sup>9</sup>

**While there are many solutions, increasing assistance funding now is paramount.** In the long term, there are many routes Maine can take, and is taking, to respond to this crisis. We can continue to invest in clean electricity and move away from expensive fossil fuels. We can double down on efficiency measures and weatherization. All of these things take time. The recent ERAC report found an electricity affordability gap of \$85 million a year. As funding from the last biennium is ending, and we are moving to automatic enrollment, which will increase subscribers dramatically, it is important that we support any and all increase in assistance funding to meet need right now. I urge you to vote ought to pass.

Sincerely,  
Lucy Hochschartner

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<sup>6</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VwnFvKnQ4gO4dBS9bqievpcI4ypj9z1O/view?usp=sharing>

<sup>7</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/13ytn\\_G3cczdzMvJp-y9Ysz3iPRBln0-\\_view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/13ytn_G3cczdzMvJp-y9Ysz3iPRBln0-_view?usp=sharing)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.economicliberties.us/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/20250102-aelp-ror-v5.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.economicliberties.us/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/20250102-aelp-ror-v5.pdf>