



Testimony of Marge Kilkelly on Behalf of the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee

In Favor of LD 1949 An Act Regarding Energy Fairness

Submitted May 12, 2025

Thank you Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology.

My name is Marge Kilkelly, and I am a Policy Consultant for the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA) which is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. The MCOA is a unifying force across sectors that is creating a new narrative about aging and older people in Maine with the goal of building local, statewide, and national support for the systemic changes needed to support our new longevity.

I am testifying in favor of LD 1949 An Act Regarding Energy Fairness.

In 2024 the Electric Ratepayer Advisory Council (ERAC) found that approximately 100,000 low-income Maine households struggle to pay high energy bills. On average those households pay approximately 8% of their household income just for electricity, which is double the maximum recommended by consumer experts.

However, the energy burden does not end there. Rural low-income households also face high costs of transportation and the volatility of unregulated home heating fuel prices (oil, propane). Many older people and people living with disabilities are at home during the day which increases both electric and heating costs. The challenges facing older people with fixed incomes are often choosing between purchasing medications, food, or paying utility bills. The added stress of disconnection increases household tension and wears on personal health.

Just over 300,000 people in Maine are over 65. The 2025 Healthy Aging Data Report finds that 17% of people over 65 live in households at or below \$20,000. In many rural communities across Maine, this percentage can be as high as 39%. To be clear, this means that more than half of the households that are energy burdened, 51,000, include a person over 65.

MCOA supports LD 1949 as it seeks to expand communications, transparency, and information in the public utility/customer relationship. LD 1949 requires the PUC to adopt rules on disconnection of services that include additional information on the process to avoid disconnection and the customer's right to appeal a decision. We believe this will improve communication and assist both the utility and the customer to find a solution.

LD 1949 provides an essential safety net for vulnerable populations by prohibiting the disconnection of utility services without petitioning the PUC for approval of that disconnection to homes of customers who are actively seeking energy assistance program resources or that include a person over 65, person living with a disability, or child under 12 months. This provision also creates an additional incentive for the utility to work with customers to provide information on available resources to avoid disconnection.

LD 1949 requires quarterly reports by public utilities to the PUC on overdue accounts, disconnections, reconnections, deposits, and payment plans. The report information will provide a timely assessment of the status of customer's energy burden and be available to influence future public policy decisions.

We urge you to support LD 1949 to help address the energy burden facing older Mainers, especially older rural Mainers.

Percentage of Households with a Householder Age 65+ Years with Annual Income less than \$20,000

