TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 1963
AN ACT TO PROTECT AND COMPENSATE PUBLIC UTILITY WHISTLEBLOWERS
TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, UTILITIES AND TECHNOLOGY

May 15, 2025

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the sponsor's amendment to LD 1963. My name is Sophie Gaulkin. I grew up in Kennebunkport, Maine and have lived in Kennebunk and Harpswell until recently. Even though I've moved to New York for the time being, as a Mainer and as a regulatory lawyer, it was important to me to come here in person and urge you to consider this bill as amended.

First, I'd like to speak about the need for the bill. It's no secret that Maine has suffered from worst-in-the-nation customer service, disastrous reliability, and excessive (and still increasing) rates for far too long. I had a bit of a reprieve when my family moved to Kennebunk, which has a consumer-owned utility, but when I moved to Harpswell as an adult, I realized that the nightmarish conditions that investor-owned utilities forced on my childhood—a childhood that is all too common in Maine, one full of extended power outages, which meant no heat in freezing conditions, no sump pump to keep the house from flooding, no phone to call for help—were the same as ever. And a major driver of that stagnancy is all too simple: the lack of accountability from our current utilities.

We need our utilities to be accountable to the people they are supposed to serve, but for far too long, our utilities have chosen profits over people, able to act imprudently or in violation of the law without sufficient transparency or realistic chance of detection.

I've closely reviewed and followed this bill not only because of my personal history with the utilities in this state but also because of my work as a regulatory lawyer, which has made me familiar with whistleblower protections in other contexts. With this background, I can unequivocally say that LD 1963 is a commonsense, tried-and-true, but still significant step in the right direction to hold our utilities accountable by empowering Mainers with actionable information to do the right thing and speak up when a utility is behaving improperly, whether it be fraudulent rate hikes, inadequate pollution controls, bribery of public officials, or other illegal acts. Properly-run utilities would be unaffected.

As it currently stands, Maine's monopolistic utilities have the upper hand with more than enough resources (which they extracted from Mainers) to silence potential whistleblowers by attempting or threatening to destroy them financially, professionally, and reputationally, whether by firing them, bringing lawsuits to saddle them with
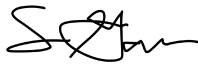
exorbitant legal fees, blacklisting them from future jobs, and attacking them in the media. Against the weight of that corporate power, it's no surprise that many would-be whistleblowers stay silent. LD 1963 would help mitigate these silencing forces. We know this because similar whistleblower protection and compensation laws have benefitted society across different contexts for decades.

Among other notable examples, whistleblowers exposed the fraudulent business practices that fueled the opioid epidemic. It is impossible to quantify how many more lives would be lost and communities would be destroyed without these whistleblowers, who may have never stepped forward without the commonsense protections they had and the possibility of compensation for the risks they took.

LD 1963 would simply balance the scales to help Mainers with actionable information to help detect, correct, and prevent a wide range of unacceptable business practices that have real-life consequences for everyday people and our state. It sends a strong signal to utilities that there are consequences for acting imprudently or against the law.

I urge the Committee to support the sponsor's amendment to LD 1963 and to bring this much-needed tool for corporate accountability to Maine.

Thank you.

Sophie Gaulkin
500A Grand Street
New York, NY 10002