

Testimony in Support of Sponsor's Amendment of LD 1963

An Act to Protect and Compensate Public Utility Whistleblowers

Steven Weems, Brunswick, Maine

To the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

May 15, 2025

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and other distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Steven Weems, Brunswick, Maine. Some of you know I have been active on energy and utility issues in several capacities, usually unpaid, over many years. I arise today in unequivocal support of the Sponsor's Amendment of LD 1963 dated May 14, 2025.. This support is based on careful, long observation of Maine's public utilities, especially its investor owned utilities (IOUs), and the difficulties of monitoring and regulating such entities effectively. It's a tough assignment and any support the Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and others (e.g., the Office of Public Advocate) can get should lead to better outcomes.

In my judgement the Sponsor's Amendment to LD 1963 would help accomplish this, based on these considerations:

1. This is a "good governance" bill in that it extends the potential sources for quality information about grievous practices in utilities to people (whistleblowers) with first-hand information about what is going on.
2. Being a whistleblower is a hazardous endeavor. Disclosure of a whistleblower's name can get them fired and in all likelihood branded with a scarlet letter in their industry, perhaps even more broadly, even if their disclosures about what is really going on is proven true. In the interest of the common good it is reasonable to protect their anonymity to the maximum extent possible and sometimes provide them with compensation in the form of 10-30% of the administrative penalty or savings to ratepayers, as determined by the Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC).

3. This bill is designed to penetrate more effectively the defensive layers of protection and obfuscation that IOUs, particularly those who are not subject to federal disclosure requirements which publicly-traded entities must observe, by encouraging a more robust flow of raw information about potential abuses costing ratepayers cold cash. I think it is significant that the PUC can decide which allegations to look into further, and how far, which seems like a sensible approach to discourage frivolous whistleblower allegations and focus on the most egregious cases of financial abuse.

For these reasons I urge you to support the Sponsor's Amendment to LD 1963 and any further sponsor amendments offered positively and report out a bill favorably meeting the objectives of this legislation. This issue should be of nonpartisan interest, and receive bipartisan support. Thank you for your attention and service to the people of Maine.

Steven Weems
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LD 1963

Please accept this amended testimony of the Sponsor's Amendment to LD 1963.