

## **Testimony**

### **In Support of LD 1963**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and members of the Committee, my name is Sue Inches and I'm from North Yarmouth. I'm testifying in support of LD 1963.

Honestly, I hadn't thought much about this issue until a couple of weeks ago when I read a story in the Boston Sunday Globe. (See: An Unlikely Whistleblower, by Patricia Wen, Boston Globe, May4, 2025).

The article is a feature story about two people who were long time employees at Exxon. One was a climate data scientist, the other an oil production forecaster. Both were in excellent standing as employees.

In 2019, the company announced projections for oil production in the Permian Basin. These two employees knew the numbers were inflated, almost double than what their calculations showed. When they questioned this, they were told to "make the math work".

The culture at Exxon encouraged employee feedback. Supervisors repeatedly urged employees to speak up if they saw something amiss. Because of this positive company culture, the two employees didn't think they were at risk in reporting the inflated numbers to their superiors and sharing the information publicly. They couldn't have been more wrong.

After the story of the inflated numbers broke in the Wall Street Journal, one was given the option to quit with three months' severance or be fired immediately. The other was told her "Values no longer aligned with the company" and was fired on the spot.

The two filed a whistleblower complaint with OSHA. Only 1.5% of whistleblower cases filed with OSHA are found to have merit. They did win their case, but Exxon appealed. Now six years later they are still engaged in a lawsuit trying to re-establish their reputations and recover \$300,000 in lost salaries and expenses. It's been a long, emotionally draining and costly process.

In Maine we have monopoly utilities with a large amount of money at stake. This is a recipe for potential wrongdoing. By passing LD 1963, you will put in place stronger measures to allow whistleblowers to come forward.

The bill before you clarifies a pathway for a whistleblower to make a report to the PUC, provides confidentiality to the whistleblower if desired, and outlines how the PUC can

compensate a whistleblower. By putting these stronger measures into law, you will protect the public from potential wrongdoing by our investor-owned utilities.

Strong whistle blower laws not only support whistleblowers who step forward, but they can also act as a deterrent to corporate wrongdoing.

LD 1963 provides a useful tool in our toolbox to make sure our public utilities are accountable to Maine people. Please support it with your vote.