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Testimony in Support: LD 307, Resolve, to Establish the Maine Artificial Intelligence Data Center Coordination Council

Greetings Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology. My name is Alf Anderson, and I am an Associate State Director for Advocacy and Outreach for AARP Maine. AARP is a non-profit, non-partisan social mission organization with more than 200,000 members across the state. We work on a range of energy issues at the state level. The core principles we approach this work with include affordability, reliability, and accountability.

AARP Maine submits this testimony in strong support of LD 307, and we appreciate the goal of studying the huge potential impacts associated with large data centers that are proliferating throughout the U.S.

In the last two years, AARP has supported such protections in regulations and legislation throughout the country to protect customers from potential rate and reliability impacts of these huge new, large loads which use large amounts of electricity around the clock.

Any proposed large data center developments must require analysis of potential impacts on customer rates and bills for energy and water services as well as ensuring the reliability of service for residential customers.

We have a few recommendations for your consideration.

The state policy goals that should be referenced in Section 2 should also include the broad language of 35-A MRSA Section 101:

“The basic purpose of this regulatory system as it applies to public utilities subject to service regulation under this Title is to ensure safe, reasonable and adequate service, to assist in minimizing the cost of energy available to the State’s consumers, to ensure that the rates of public utilities subject to rate regulation are just and reasonable to customers and public utilities and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet the greenhouse gas emissions reduction levels set forth in Title 38, section 576-A.”

The language in the current draft of the resolve does not properly address the affordability criterion as required by our regulation of public utilities. Nor is the reliability of essential electric service incorporated by the objectives or policies listed in the Resolve.

The makeup of the Council membership, as detailed in Section 3, is currently weighted toward existing governmental offices and representatives of the electric utilities. In addition, the Resolve proposes that three non-governmental individuals can be appointed by the Commissioner of Energy Resources to represent municipalities, an environmental advocacy organization, and organized labor. We think that this membership would benefit from the inclusion of representatives from statewide consumer organizations, water utilities, gas utilities, county commissioners, and tribal representatives and we would urge the expansion of this Council.

Regarding the process proposed for the Council and its reports in Section 4, we recommend that the public participation process be expanded. The Resolve calls for at least five public meetings, all of which should be widely promoted and held in various geographic locations throughout the State. Under the current language, these public meetings are not advertised to the public and could be held in locations that may not allow for necessary transparency and public participation.

Finally, the issuance of a draft report should be accompanied by a process that ensures widespread publication and opportunity for written and oral comments before the Council.

In closing, AARP Maine strongly supports this bill and the goal of protecting Maine electricity and water consumers from the impact of large loads like data centers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on this important bill. If I can answer any questions or provide any further information, you can reach me at aanderson@aarp.org or 207.330.1147.

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