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PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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**Testimony of the Maine Public Utilities Commission
In Support of**

**LD 1282, An Act to Streamline Income Verification Requests for Income
Supplementation and Assistance Programs**

April 19, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services (Committee), my name is Deirdre Schneider, testifying in support of the sponsor's amendment to LD 1282, An Act to Streamline Income Verification Requests for Income Supplementation and Assistance Programs, on behalf of the Public Utilities Commission (Commission).

Each transmission and distribution utility (utility) in the State is required to implement a low-income assistance program. The Low-Income Assistance Program (LIAP) is designed to assist qualified low-income electricity consumers in paying their electricity costs. Eligibility for LIAP is based on eligibility for LIHEAP or participation in a DHHS means tested programs with a household income at or less than 75% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. If an individual qualifies for LIAP, they will receive a credit on their electric bill that is based on their income and electricity usage.

Eligibility to participate in LIAP was expanded in 2022 to include utility consumers that participate in a DHHS means tested programs with a household income at or less than 75% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. When eligibility was expanded, the Commission increased the funding for the program from about \$7.8 million to \$15 million.

Since the expansion of the program, the Commission has been exploring ways to make enrolling consumers who participate in a DHHS means tested program more efficient. Initial notice of eligibility was provided by DHHS in a letter. If a consumer of a utility received a letter, they were required to contact their utility and provide the letter as proof of eligibility. After the distribution of letters, the Commission added to its website an online application for LIAP. The Commission has been working with DHHS on this issue and DHHS has been extremely helpful. However, this bill would help facilitate automatic enrollment of eligible customers which would greatly expand participation and make the enrollment process easier for consumers and DHHS.

Since expanding eligibility, the Commission has been surprised by the lower than expected participation level of consumers that participate in a means tested program and are concerned that the letter process is a potential barrier for enrollment. The Commission is looking to this legislation to streamline eligibility verification and perhaps allow those who are eligible to automatically be enrolled in LIAP instead of the current system.

I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information for the work session.