

1964

Senator Tipping
Representative Roeder
Members of the Committee on Labor and Housing

Re: LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program

Senator Tipping and Representative Roeder and Members of the Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Debra Hart and I am a resident of Manchester, Maine. I am speaking today in opposition to LD 1964 on behalf of my client, the Dirigo Electric Cooperative. Dirigo is an association of consumer-owned electric utilities that provide electric service in parts of Maine. These utilities include Van Buren Power & Light, Eastern Maine Electric Cooperative, Houlton Water Company, Madison Electric Works, Kennebunk Power & Light, Fox Island Electric Cooperative, Isle Au Haut, and the electric facility at Brunswick Landing. The companies were all established to provide electric service to unserved or underserved parts of the State. Their customers are their owners, and they have no stockholders or shareholders.

The opposition to the bill is not based on not wanting to provide leave for their employees when circumstances arise where leave is warranted. Being small companies, they know their employees and treat them like family. They are not unsympathetic to situations when an employee must take time off to help a family member or for themselves. However, the nature of an electric utility business is oftentimes all hands-on deck during storm restoration or other catastrophic situations. Only trained line workers can provide these services and they are staffed appropriately to ensure the public has safe and reliable service.

All of the companies provide leave and work with their employees when they must be absent from work. This bill, however, would be unworkable in many situations, and we firmly believe there should be an exemption for utilities. During the recent pandemic, utility workers took no time off ~~ they were deemed essential services for good reason. In our view, that has not changed.

Thank you for your time and attention. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have or bring further information to your work session.