



**Testimony in Opposition to LD 589 (as amended)**

**Resolve, Directing the Public Utilities Commission to Ensure That the Maine Electric Grid Provides Additional Benefits to Maine Ratepayers**

**January 11, 2024**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and members of the committee, my name is James Cote and I am here today on behalf of Versant Power in respectful opposition to LD 589.

As amended, LD 589 would require the Public Utilities Commission to:

1. Conduct an investigation of grid enhancing technologies that could be implemented by transmission and distribution utilities to minimize the need for investment in new grid infrastructure in the State, and;
2. Issue a request for proposals to select a consultant to conduct a study of beneficial load and provide a plan for beneficial electrification that integrates with the ongoing energy planning efforts of the Governor's Energy Office and encourages the consistent and efficient development of additional renewable resources and the beneficial electrification required to minimize fossil fuel emissions.

Versant Power fully supports the goals of leveraging grid technologies that can improve performance and save customers' money, including by deferring more traditional T&D infrastructure investments. We believe, however, that the responsibility for investigating, implementing and managing these technologies rests more appropriately with the utilities themselves than with the regulators who are charged with evaluating utility spending to ensure prudence and alignment with policy goals.

For example, Versant Power is already pursuing Dynamic Line Rating technologies. Versant's bulk transmission assets will have line ratings that are calculated based on ambient weather conditions, likely enabling more renewable energy to flow in optimum conditions. This technology will be especially advantageous to wind generation as wind speed in particular has the most significant impact on line capacity.

Additionally, Versant is actively pursuing an advanced distribution management system (ADMS) (and is seeking federal grant funding to help defray some of the ratepayer impact of this technology). That platform will be anchored on a new geographic information system (GIS) with an ADMS consisting of distribution SCADA, outage management, real-time situation awareness and grid optimization applications, and a distributed energy resource (DER) management module. This will allow Versant Power to improve reliability and resilience- minimizing the impact of outages- and expand DER integration consistent with state policy goals.

As with all investments we make, these technologies will subject to rigorous and public review by stakeholders and approval by the Public Utilities Commission in future rate cases.



Versant is also hopeful that the ongoing Integrated Grid Planning process, authorized by the passage of LD 1959 in 2022, will result in the proposal and evaluation of various solutions to projected grid needs identified by the IGP analyses. These solutions will no doubt include traditional T&D infrastructure as well as grid enhancing technologies, non-wires alternatives, innovative rate designs and/or policy changes, all aimed at meeting future needs as cost effectively as possible. We anticipate both utilities and the broad array of active stakeholder participants in the IGP process will bring forward proposed solutions to be weighed based on the priorities identified by the Commission as well as a series of consensus evaluation criteria. Versant Power believes this process is the best venue in which to transparently and rigorously evaluate a wide array of potential solutions.

For these reasons, we are concerned that requiring the Commission to expend significant resources to explore these technologies could be duplicative or require additional staffing and other demands that will be borne by ratepayers.

In short, Versant Power shares many of the high-level goals this bill seeks to accomplish and is fully committed to leveraging innovative technologies to improve service and minimize customer costs. Much of this work is currently underway within the company and as part of ongoing Commission dockets including the IGP process.

Thank you for your consideration and we would be pleased to provide more information at the work session upon your request.