

PRESERVE

RURAL MAINE

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, Members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology –

My name is Tanya Blanchard and I am testifying on behalf of Preserve Rural Maine (PRM) in opposition to LD 1963 - An Act Regarding the Future of Renewable Energy Transmission in Northern Maine.

You may not be familiar with Preserve Rural Maine, so I'll tell you a little about our organization. PRM was formed to preserve the communities, cultures, and environmental integrity of rural Maine. We were founded only a few months ago as a direct result of LD 1710 (enacted in 2021) and LD 924 (enacted in 2023).

Following the approval of these bills, 3500 letters were mailed to Maine property owners by LS Power. These letters were the first notification of a new high voltage transmission line to be built on or near their properties. These landowners were completely blindsided by the potential loss of their life as they knew it.

The founders of PRM saw the need to provide information to landowners who were dealing with the prospect of eminent domain, and we organized quickly to provide information, coordinate the efforts of municipalities, and to retain legal counsel for our members. We currently have more than 1,200 people who have signed up through various outlets to stay informed about this transmission line and similar projects.

Upon realizing the impact of the transmission line project, sixteen towns along the proposed route took action. These towns passed moratoriums preventing high voltage transmission lines within their boundaries and have already passed or are working on ordinances requiring any high voltage transmission lines to be buried.

As you know, the procurement for this transmission line was cancelled just before the Christmas holiday, giving rural Maine residents the gift of a reprieve. But this bill, LD 1963, effectively restarts the procurement process for generation and transmission infrastructure with an even broader scope while doing nothing to remove the threat of industrial scale infrastructure in rural Maine communities. For that reason, we oppose this bill.

PRM supports renewable energy generation, but believes that development must also take rural Maine into consideration. While the Northern Maine Renewable Energy Program states that proposals should be evaluated based on “cost”, that evaluation does not include costs to Maine businesses, property value depreciation near energy infrastructure, impacts to farms, impact to Maine tourism, nor the environmental impact. The whole of the state should be considered when doing a cost/benefit analysis – something that an independent feasibility study could address. Without first requiring a study to determine the best and most effective course of action, this bill is essentially playing blindfolded darts with rural Maine property owners standing between the thrower and the target. Without a feasibility study, there’s no way to know if what is being proposed is truly the best path forward.

Once enacted, legislation directs the PUC to issue a request for proposal following the requirements outlined in the statute. The procurement evaluation process doesn’t allow the PUC to review a proposed project against alternative technologies, only which proposal best meets the statutory requirement. PRM believes that alternative technologies might well meet Maine’s energy goals without harming our communities, and therefore LD 1963 is too limiting in scope to allow for what may be a better large-scale infrastructure option. We believe that in a state as unique as Maine, with forests that are at constant risk of fragmentation, farms that already are shrinking, and distinct communities and cultures, the solution to solving energy questions should be just as unique.

Thank you.