

Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee
LD 1963 An Act Regarding the Future of Renewable Energy Transmission
in Northern Maine

Testimony provided by Joshua Abram Kerckmar, Unity, Maine (Jan. 11, 2024)

Good afternoon, Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and distinguished Members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology.

My name is Josh Kerckmar, and I am testifying in opposition to LD 1963 because the bill suffers many of the same omissions that impaired LD 1710 and LD 924. Here's what I'd like to see in a renewable energy bill:

1. Transparency around how large the transmission system will be. The language in LD 1963 expands the RFP by changing the wording from "line" to "infrastructure" and clearly allows the construction of greater line capacity (up to the maximum number of megawatts permitted by ISO-NE).
2. Clarity about how the PUC will navigate its conflicting allegiances. LD 1963 pushes the PUC (which exists to protect ratepayers) to collaborate with the Governor's Energy Office (which reports only to the Governor and does not seek to protect ratepayers).
3. Transparency around which states and entities the PUC will now coordinate with as it develops the RFP.
4. Commitment to a third-party feasibility study that analyzes project viability; gives insight into technical, environmental, and social considerations; and clears the way for a smoother process going forward, thereby preventing long-term delays. I'm grateful that the Legislative Council voted (10-0) in favor of a bill that would authorize such a study, and I'm hopeful that it can advance in a timely manner.
5. The creation of a transmission siting committee along the lines of what New Hampshire has established. The committee would take into account multiple considerations -- economic, environmental, and social -- *before* the PUC procures a developer. As it stands now, the PUC purely considers upfront costs to ratepayers. But the "cheapest" option that maximizes profits for big corporations like LS Power and CMP isn't always the best option for local ecosystems and ordinary people -- precisely the stakeholders we all need to protect. That's why I believe in the need to define "cost" more broadly, which a siting committee could help do.

Finally, I believe the premise of the bill is wrong. Tackling climate change in a socially equitable way means seeking smaller-scale solutions (like distributed generation and community micro-grids) that focus less on enriching massive out-of-state development firms and more on empowering the people of Maine.

Thank you.