

PRESERVE
RURAL MAINE

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and distinguished members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee.

My name is Tanya Blanchard, and I am here to support LD 2087, “An Act to Protect Property Owners by Preventing the Use of Eminent Domain to Build Transmission Lines Under the Northern Maine Renewable Energy Development Program” both personally and on behalf of Preserve Rural Maine.

Last summer when my husband and I learned that we might lose a portion of our home to a high voltage transmission line we were devastated. Our hearts were shattered, and our sanctuary was under threat. Our story, unfortunately, is not unique and is shared by hundreds of others.

Our home is more than a house and acreage. It's the haven where our family gathers to celebrate joyous occasions and it's where we support each other during difficult times. Owning a piece of land around our home was a dream we worked tirelessly to realize. Our family has many dreams and aspirations for this cherished space.

In our woods, our children and grandchildren find laughter and adventure. We tap maple trees, identify birds and animal tracks, and simply revel in the tranquility that our little slice of nature provides. It's the refuge where we seek solace from the relentless onslaught of work pressures, the heart-wrenching realities of family medical issues, and the challenges of supporting aging parents. It's not just a piece of land; it's our anchor in the storm, the sacred ground where we find strength amidst life's toughest battles. This land is the inheritance we want to leave our children. We may not be wealthy in the traditional sense, but having this piece of land makes us feel abundantly rich.

This bill is necessary. For many Mainers, our home is the largest part of our net worth – according to the US Census Bureau the average net worth in Maine in 2021 was \$354,300¹ and equity in our homes made up about 56% of that. Now imagine suddenly decreasing the value of a home by 40-50%². What does that do to the financial picture of the average Mainer?

The Northern Maine Renewable Energy Program was enacted without a clear understanding of the potential location of the transmission lines. Subsequently, a route was approved by legislature even though the route maps had not been published. Despite Maine's requirement for a 2/3 vote to run transmission lines on public land or rail trails, the legislature opted for the easier legislative path, permitting the route to extend across 150 miles of privately owned land without seeking input from property owners along or near the proposed route.

¹ https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/wealth/2021/wealth-asset-ownership/State_Wealth_tables_dy2021.xlsx
² David Wyman & Chris Mothorpe (2018) The Pricing of Power Lines: A Geospatial Approach to Measuring Residential Property Values, Journal of Real Estate Research, 40:1, 121-154, DOI: [10.1080/10835547.2018.12091490](https://doi.org/10.1080/10835547.2018.12091490)

Viable routes connecting Southern Aroostook County to the ISO-NE grid exist, but they require the mandated 2/3 vote. These alternative routes could potentially offer more environmentally friendly solutions and greater benefits for rural Maine residents and farmers. Unfortunately, these options were never explored, as developers deemed private land an easier target. It's worth noting that it was the Maine legislature that essentially sanctioned this focus on private land.

Passing LD 2087 as written doesn't cancel the Northern Maine Renewable Energy Program, but it does push developers and legislators to work together to find a better way. During recent testimony, Senator Troy Jackson said he'd have a problem with a transmission line running in his own back yard. Why sentence rural Mainers to carry this burden?