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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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Testimony in Support of
LD 1962, An Act to Limit Utility Shut-offs
Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
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Good morning, Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology. My name is Troy Jackson. I have the honor of serving as the President of the Maine Senate and of representing northern Aroostook County in Senate District 1. I am here today to introduce an amended version of LD 1962, "An Act to Limit Utility Shut-offs."

We have all seen electricity rates rise over the past couple of years. As rates continue to rise, more and more Mainers are facing difficult choices that nobody should have to make. Whether to pay their electric bill or buy groceries for the week. Whether to buy medicine or keep the lights on. And though we have done important work to provide help to people in these circumstances, people are still facing these choices. I brought this bill forward to help mitigate the effects of such a choice. Not being able to pay your power bill shouldn't put your life at risk, but with the extreme weather events that are becoming more common each year, that is increasingly the case.

This bill aims to achieve this goal by

- requiring a maximum temperature at which shut offs can occur, so that Mainers are protected both during the winter and on our hottest days in the summer,
- increasing the minimum arrearage that must be due before disconnection can occur, to reflect rising energy prices,
- eliminating reconnection fees, security deposits, and late fees for low income folks working to get back on track with their payments, so that every possible hurdle is removed, and
- requiring in-person visits for disconnection, to ensure that folks have every opportunity to prevent disconnection of their power before it happens.

I believe that these protections will help people to get back on track while keeping vulnerable situations from becoming catastrophic. However, I also believe that we need to ensure that

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costs remain affordable. This is why I've included a section to explicitly include affordability in the PUC's statement of purpose. By keeping a focus on affordability for all while protecting our most vulnerable neighbors, we can work toward a future where everyone is able to meet their basic needs without facing terrible choices.

I urge you to vote ought to pass as amended in support of this bill. Thank you for your time. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.