

LD 1962

Testimony in Partial Opposition to LD 1962, An Act to Limit Utility Shut Offs

Senator Lawrence

Representative Zeigler

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

My name is Debra Hart, and I am a resident of Manchester, Maine. I am providing this testimony on behalf of my clients, the Dirigo Electric Cooperative. The Dirigo companies, which are consumer-owned, include Van Buren Light & Power District, Houlton Water Company, Eastern Maine Electric Cooperative, Fox Island Electric Cooperative, Madison Electric Works, Kennebunk Light & Power District and the Brunswick Landing Electric Utility (collectively, "the COUs").

Our opposition to the proposed sponsor amendment on LD 1962 is in Sec 4. 1-C. In-person visit required prior to remote disconnection. This section requires a utility to make an in-person visit to the premise to attempt in-person contact with the customer prior to the disconnection to provide an oral summary of the customer's rights concerning the termination or disconnection. Utilities are subject to strict rules for disconnections under Chapter 815 of the Commission's rules including disconnection notice procedures, the time when disconnections can occur, and what conditions must be met before disconnection procedures can begin. It is worth noting that disconnections cannot take place during the winter months. Consumers are also protected by robust rules for disconnections.

Remote disconnect and reconnect capability is a valuable cost savings tool for utilities, and its ratepayers that improves operational efficiency and safety. The proposed language significantly erodes the value for an AMI and impedes modernization efforts of utility operations. Utility personnel may travel long distances to make an in-person contact only to find the customer is not at the residence or unwilling to make contact with the utility.

In the Chapter 815 rules, Attempt to contact, it has made this provision: *For utilities that have the ability to remote disconnect, this duty is met if the utility makes at least two telephone attempts, one before 5:00 p.m. and one after 5:00 p.m., and the utility provides written notice of the utility's ability to remote disconnect pursuant to Section 5(A).*

In closing, we appreciate that disconnections are a difficult subject for many customers. Utilities work diligently to provide their consumers with payment options available to them including social service programs, however, sometimes the only option in the end is a disconnection when a customer is either unable or unwilling to set up or keep a payment plan. For these reasons, we hope you will continue to allow the use of AMI system meters and remote disconnections.