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January 25, 2024

Honorable Mark Lawrence, Senate Chair
Honorable Stanley Zeigler House Chair
Joint Legislative Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Testimony Neither for nor Against LD 1962, An Act To Limit Utility Shut-offs

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

The Maine Water Utilities Association (MWUA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony neither for nor against LD 1962, which bill proposes to include affordability as a regulatory purpose for rates, prohibit the disconnection of electric and gas customers during extreme weather or temperature events, prohibiting electric utilities from charging restoration or reconnection fees or deposits, and prohibits electric utilities from disconnecting service unless the utility has made an in-person visit to the premises.

About MWUA. MWUA is a nonprofit association based in Augusta that provides support for water works professionals throughout the State of Maine in advocating for safe drinking water through educational and technical programming as well as advocacy on the local, state, and national level. The Association was formed in 1925 and counts approximately 109 water utilities in Maine as members.

Discussion. MWUA is concerned with the addition of “affordable” in the description of rates for public utilities. “Affordable” is ambiguous and vague and needs statutory clarification. Water utilities strive for affordability but the cost to operate a utility must be borne by ratepayers. Shifting rates from one group of ratepayers to another may not meet the existing statutory language of “just and reasonable.”

Conclusion. Our Association and its members care very much about providing high quality water service at reasonable rates. If the legislature has a desire to require affordability as a criterion for rate setting, there must be more consideration of the impact on the utility’s ability to continue providing high quality service, and the financial impact on all ratepayers.

Thank you for your consideration,

Roger Crouse,
Chair, MWUA Legislative & Regulatory Affairs Committee

cc: James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, Legislative Counsel