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PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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**Testimony of the Maine Public Utilities Commission**

**Neither For Nor Against**

**LD 2067, An Act To Continue the Arrearage Management Program (Sponsor's Amendment)**

February 1, 2024

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology (Committee), my name is Deirdre Schneider, testifying neither for nor against the sponsor's amendment to LD 2067, An Act to Continue the Arrearage Management Program on behalf of the Public Utilities Commission (Commission).

The Commission finds that an Arrearage Management Program is a helpful tool for ratepayers that are struggling with past due utility bills. This program provides a lifeline to allow an individual to make monthly, on-time payments, in exchange for having their past due amount excused, in part or in full. Additionally, program participants receive complementary services from the Efficiency Maine Trust (Trust), including electricity assessments, advice on options to reduce electricity consumption, and information on how to access Trust programs, including enhanced incentives available from the Trust for low-income households. Participants also receive financial advice and coaching services from the Community Action Agencies while they're enrolled in the AMP. While, the program has not proved to be a complete success, the Commission still thinks there is value in extending the sunset date until 2028.

The Commission would like to note that it may be helpful for the Committee to consider alternative objectives for the program. The current report focuses quite heavily on evaluating changes in payment habits for participants and while this has been an important objective of the program, the Commission feels that it has been adequately studied at this point in time. The extension of the sunset date results in the Commission submitting another report in 2028 that assesses the effectiveness of the program. Producing this report is somewhat resource intensive and the Commission believes a future report will yield similar results to the past two reports on this topic. If there were other variables the Committee wished the Commission to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of the program in the future, it would be helpful to consider amending the reporting requirement to capture these alternative considerations.

I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information for the work session.