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Testimony in opposition to LD 810 - An Act Regarding the Approval of Transmission Lines

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee:

My name is Tanya Blanchard, and I am the President of Preserve Rural Maine (PRM). PRM is an organization dedicated to preserving the communities, cultures, and environmental integrity of rural Maine. Our mission is to ensure that rural communities, particularly those that are socioeconomically disadvantaged, have an active voice in decisions that will shape their future. As an organization committed to protecting both the natural landscapes and the cultural heritage of Maine's rural areas, we strongly oppose LD 810. Our organization has consistently worked to amplify the voices of those in rural Maine who often bear the brunt of large industrial development projects—such as high-impact electric transmission lines—without receiving adequate consideration for their concerns. These projects, while potentially beneficial on a larger scale, can come at a significant cost to local communities and the environment.

In 2021, the 59.8% of the People of Maine voted in favor of LD 1295, requiring legislative approval for transmission lines¹. This vote also requires two-thirds vote for such projects that use public land. Maine Statute clearly lays out the requirements:

6-C. High-impact electric transmission line; legislative approval. In addition to obtaining a certificate of public convenience and necessity, a high-impact electric transmission line may not be constructed anywhere in the State without first obtaining the approval of the Legislature, except that any high-impact electric transmission line crossing or utilizing public lands designated by the Legislature pursuant to Title 12, section 598-A, other than service land, is deemed to substantially alter the land and must be approved by the vote of 2/3 of all the members elected to each House of the Legislature.

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/sos/news/2021/electionresults11-2-21.html>

Legislative approval is “in addition to” obtaining a CPCN, which means it cannot come before that process before the PUC. In fact, it is quite impossible to know whether 2/3 of all the members must vote for approval if the route of the transmission line has not been determined.

LD 810 not only disregards the wishes of Maine voters but also threatens to undermine the local, democratic decision-making process that has allowed our rural communities to thrive. This bill would set a dangerous precedent by fast-tracking approval for projects that lack essential details and transparency, further marginalizing the voices of rural Maine.

As Maine residents, we hold dear the principles of transparency, accountability, and respect for the will of the people. We believe this bill undermines those principles in ways that could have long-term detrimental effects on our communities, environment, and economy. Among our concerns:

1. **Voter Mandate:** As stated above, in 2021, 59% of Maine voters supported a ballot measure requiring legislative approval for high-impact transmission lines. This was not a minor decision. The people of Maine made their position clear: they want elected representatives to have the authority to weigh in on projects that will significantly affect our landscapes, communities, and way of life. The legislature, by passing this bill, would disregard the clear message sent by voters and circumvent the democratic process. We cannot afford to disregard the voice of the people in such crucial matters.
2. **Lack of Specifics on the Projects:** This bill paves the way for transmission lines without knowing any meaningful specifics. We do not know any designated routes, developers, budgets, environmental impacts, societal impacts, or project goals. Approving a bill that rushes through future projects with so many unanswered questions would be irresponsible and could result in unforeseen environmental, economic, and social consequences.
3. **Environmental and Community Impact:** The construction of high-impact electric transmission lines through Maine would have serious consequences for our environment and communities. Without a clear plan in place, it is impossible to determine the potential harm to our forests, wildlife, and local economies. Maine is known for its pristine natural beauty, and the citizens who call it home deserve to have a full understanding of how such projects would impact their lives **before** any legislative action is taken.
4. **Due Process and Transparency:** LD 810 proposes to fast-track decisions that should undergo extensive review and public input. The decision to approve such high-impact infrastructure projects must not be rushed, and it should involve a transparent process that fully considers the interests of Maine people. The PUC’s review of the project, including its environmental, economic, and social impacts, is vital to ensuring that Maine’s energy future is sustainable, affordable, and in line with the public’s interests. Approving future projects before that review process is completed would undermine the integrity of the PUC’s role and reduce public confidence in the process.
5. **Precedent for Undermining Voter Rights:** By granting such broad legislative approval without public input and due process, LD 810 would set a troubling precedent that could lead to more projects being approved behind closed doors, bypassing public debate and

voter rights. This sets a dangerous trajectory that could erode the trust citizens have in their elected officials and the integrity of democratic decision-making.

In conclusion, this bill contradicts the will of the people of Maine, it pushes forward projects without any details and legislative oversight, and would have lasting consequences for our state's environment, economy, and future. I urge you to respect the voters' mandate and reject **LD 810**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tanya Blanchard

President

Preserve Rural Maine