



MAINE RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

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

From: Bradley Sawyer, Deputy Director

Date: April 8, 2025

Re: Testimony in Opposition to L.D. 1309, An Act to Increase the Membership of the Public Utilities Commission to 5 Members

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in opposition to L.D. 1309. The Maine Rural Water Association is a member-driven nonprofit organization based in Richmond, dedicated to providing training, technical assistance, and advocacy on behalf of our approximately three hundred members. The majority of our membership consists of water and wastewater utilities from across the state, all of whom are deeply committed to ensuring clean, safe drinking water and protecting the environment through the proper treatment of wastewater.

This proposal to expand the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) from three to five commissioners raises significant concerns regarding necessity, cost, and redundancy. There has been no compelling evidence presented to the regulated communities to suggest that the current structure of the PUC is inadequate to handle its existing regulatory responsibilities. The Commission has effectively carried out its duties with three commissioners for decades. You heard recently from Commission Chair Bartlett that the PUC has expanded their staff in recent years. These positions were approved with the belief that they would be sufficient to handle the workload but have come with added cost to utility ratepayers. The addition of two full-time commissioners will undoubtedly result in higher administrative costs — salaries, benefits, staff support, and related operational expenses. These costs will ultimately be borne by the very people and small systems we represent ratepayers in Maine's rural communities. Many of the small water systems operate on razor-thin margins, and any increase in regulatory costs — however incremental — has a disproportionate impact on rural users.

The bill also requires that one of the new commissioners have "significant experience in the field of consumer advocacy or public interest law." While well-intentioned, this requirement is unnecessary given the long-standing existence and operation of the Office of the Public Advocate. That independent office already fulfills the role of representing consumer interests before the PUC and other forums. Adding a commissioner for this purpose introduces the potential for overlapping responsibilities and politicizes what should remain a neutral and balanced regulatory body.

For these reasons, the Maine Rural Water Association respectfully urges this Committee to reject LD 1309. This legislation would impose unnecessary costs, create redundancy, and expand government without a clear, demonstrated benefit to Maine's ratepayers. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.