



April 24, 2025

Honorable Mark Lawrence
Honorable Melanie Sachs
Joint Legislative Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Testimony LD 1473, An Act to Require Utilities to Monitor Meters for Natural Gas Leaks

Dear Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Committee:

Unitil appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to LD 1743. Unitil currently maintains a pipe safety and inspection program that surpasses what this bill seeks to achieve, and at the same time, we are concerned that this bill tries to put into statute a one-size-fits-all leak monitoring system that is best left to the discretion of the Maine Public Utilities Commission.

About Unitil. Unitil is a natural gas and electric distribution company in Northern New England, serving natural gas customers in Maine as Northern Utilities. Unitil is Maine's largest natural gas distribution company, serving approximately 43,900 customers in the state within the following communities: Auburn, Bangor, Biddeford, Brewer, Bucksport, Cape Elizabeth, Cumberland, Eliot, Falmouth, Gorham, Gray, Kennebunk, Kittery, Lewiston, Lisbon, Lincoln, Lisbon Falls, New Gloucester, North Berwick, Old Orchard Beach, Old Town, Orono, Poland, Portland, Saco, Sanford, Scarborough, Searsport, South Berwick, South Portland, Veazie, Wells, and Westbrook. Unitil and its predecessors have been serving customers in Maine since 1849.

Synopsis of LD 1473. If enacted, LD 1473 would require gas utilities in Maine to monitor every meter under its jurisdiction for leaks and report annually to the commission on the number of leaks identifies and any actions taken by the utility to address the leaks. It also requires the Commission to contract with a qualified impartial 3rd party to periodically assess utility compliance with this section at a frequency determined by the commission.

Unitil is committed to safety and sustainability. Last fall, Unitil completed a 14-year project to replace all cast iron and bare steel pipe within the Greater Portland area, removing the last of so-called 'leak prone' pipe from the state. This was a significant undertaking, and an important one. With this project now complete, Maine currently has one of the most modernized gas systems in the northeast where the risk of leaks is dramatically reduced. On top of these investments, Unitil has committed to an advanced leak detection program in support of its sustainability goals and has committed to bring the program to the Bangor area as part of its recent purchase of Bangor Natural Gas. This program involves annual surveys of Unitil infrastructure to seek out gas at a parts per billion level, far exceeding typical standards in order to bring total operating 'Scope One' emissions to 50 percent of 2019 baseline levels and net zero by 2050.

Current law requires regular leak inspections. Under federal law, gas utilities are required to undertake leak inspection of their entire system no less than once every five years, and no less than

one every 15 months within commercial areas. Unlike LD 1473, the federal requirement covers the entire system, where the risk of leakage is greater, and is not limited to meters like LD 1473, where the risk of leakage is lower. On top of this federal requirement, gas utilities are required to file leakage management plans with the Maine PUC, which in the case of Unitil are broader in scope than LD 1473 and exceed federal law.

Unitil has a robust system monitoring program approved through the Maine PUC. Unitil has already committed to the monitoring of all meters, service lines and distribution mains as part of its Operations and Maintenance (O&M) standards. Unitil is required to file O&M standards annually with the Maine PUC, and once filed and approved, they are binding and enforceable by the PUC via fines. Excerpts of the relevant language follow:

2.3.2 Frequency of Leak Surveys on Gas Mains and Services:

(d) In Maine, Unitil shall conduct a risk-based leakage survey program for all gas mains with, at minimum, the requirements as set forth in 49 CFR 192.723. As part of its compliance with 49 CFR 192.605, Procedural manuals for operations, maintenance, and emergencies, Unitil will provide the detail on the survey cycles. The Distribution Integrity Management Program (DIMP) written plan required as part of 49 CFR Subpart P will provide the justification, based on the data and metrics compiled and reviewed as part of DIMP, for the selection of each survey cycle identified in Unitil's operations and maintenance procedures.

2.3.6 Leak Survey of Company-Owned Piping

(a) Unitil owned gas piping, including meters and meter fits, shall be leak surveyed annually, not to exceed 15 months, for locations inside business districts, and at least once every 36 months, not to exceed 39 months, at locations outside of business districts. This survey should be completed in conjunction with an atmospheric corrosion inspection (see Section 4.0 below)

(b) A leak survey and exposed pipe inspection shall be conducted whenever a technician is at a customer's premises to perform the following, provided that Unitil-owned gas piping is readily accessible. This inspection should be documented through the MDS work order and any follow up work noted.

As noted in both the federal rules and the provisions on file with the Maine PUC, there are minimum leakage survey timeframes based on where the piping is located. The survey requirements are not limited to meters, and includes piping and meter fits. However, the rules are framed in manner that gas distribution utilities like Unitil must provide the regulator with data and metrics, which information must be used to determine survey cycles for the gas system. In this regard, survey cycles are driven by needs and determined by data, and not solely by statutory or regulatory dates – other than the minimums noted above.

LD 1473 is a one-size-fits-all approach that adds costly process without improving safety. As noted, LD 1473 has a limited focus: inspection and reporting on leakage related to gas meters. The bill provides no guidance regarding other elements of the gas system, like the distribution system itself, which is already addressed by federal law and the monitoring plans submitted by Unitil. The bill also imposes a rigid statutory requirement of annual monitoring and reporting regarding meters, regardless of whether the circumstances warrant this level of frequency. Certainly, if the Maine PUC felt that the facts and circumstances warranted more frequent meter testing and reporting by a gas utility, the Commission has the ability to do so today. But mandating annual reporting in statute takes away the ability of the Maine PUC to exercise its discretion to allow less

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frequent testing when not needed – which is the case with a system like Unitil's which is new and constructed of materials not prone to leaks. And, if Maine law requires unnecessary testing, that is ultimately a financial burden on Maine energy consumers that offers little value in return.

Conclusion: Based on this information, a new statute on meter inspections in Maine is both unneeded and costly. As noted, federal law already has broad gas system survey requirements with minimum timeframes, which standards are exceeded by Unitil and the Maine PUC. Those standards also have flexibility built-in based on data that is collected. This bill is at best redundant to existing statutes and, at worst, creates confusion and higher energy costs for Maine consumers. For this reason, we urge the Committee to vote ought not to pass on LD 1473.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on this bill, and please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Alec O'Meara

Director, External Affairs

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