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Testimony of Representative Holly Eaton introducing
**LD 1929, An Act to Improve Public Utility Service by Addressing Seasonal
Property Hazards**
Before the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee

Good morning, Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee. For the record, my name is Representative Holly Eaton, and I represent House District 15, which includes the coastal and island communities of Deer Isle, Stonington, Brooklin, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Frenchboro, Swan's Island, Isle au Haut, and Vinalhaven.

I'm here today to present LD 1929, a bill intended to strengthen communication and coordination around seasonal properties that may pose hazards to public utility service – particularly in rural and coastal communities where seasonal residency is high and neighbors may be miles apart.

The bill directs the Public Utilities Commission to coordinate a reporting system – such as an online portal or phone line – where hazards involving seasonal properties can be flagged and relayed quickly. It also encourages utilities to identify trouble spots where seasonal conditions have caused repeated issues and inspect those locations periodically. Finally, the bill asks seasonal property owners to do their part by providing up-to-date caretaker or emergency contact information, and by ensuring that their property – especially if they have overhead lines – is checked at least once a year for clear and visible risks, like overhanging branches or leaning poles.

This is not about enforcement. This is not a mandate. It's a framework for shared responsibility – one that recognizes that many of our seasonal roads and island communities now go months without occupied homes. In those conditions, when a storm hits and a tree comes down on the line, there's often no one to report it – or no way for a utility to confirm what's happening – until long after damage has spread. And while utilities like Versant do a good job responding to outages, their mapping systems rely on multiple customer calls to prioritize responses. If you're the only year-round resident on a road, your call might not reflect the urgency of the situation.

This bill aims to address that gap with the systems we already have. It does not create a new agency or require municipalities to manage a new program. Utilities already maintain customer

District 15: Brooklin, Deer Isle, Eagle Island Township, Frenchboro, Southwest Harbor,
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records – this simply asks them to collect and retain one additional piece of contact information when applicable. The reporting system would fall under the PUC’s existing scope, and the bill encourages use of federal funding – especially from resilience or storm preparedness programs – to support any additional work. It is lean by design, but it builds a structure we can grow into.

Part of what makes rural and coastal Maine so special is the sense of community – the trust that you can rely on your neighbor, and that they can rely on you. That doesn’t have to end when someone leaves for the season. In fact, being a good neighbor – whether you’re here year-round or not – includes making sure people know how to reach you in an emergency, and taking simple steps to prevent problems when you can. This bill is about protecting each other. It’s about keeping that spirit of community strong, even as the landscape around us continues to change.

LD 1929 offers a thoughtful and achievable step forward. I hope you’ll support it, and I’m happy to work with the committee on refinements to make sure it meets the practical needs of towns, utilities, and residents alike.

Thank you for your time and consideration.