



STATE OF MAINE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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Testimony of the Maine Public Utilities Commission

Neither For Nor Against

LD 1929, An Act to Improve Public Utility Service by Addressing Seasonal Property Hazards

May 8, 2025

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology (Committee), my name is Deirdre Schneider, testifying neither for nor against LD 1929, An Act to Improve Public Utility Service by Addressing Seasonal Property Hazards on behalf of the Public Utilities Commission (Commission).

LD 1929 requires owners of seasonal properties to conduct annual inspections to identify and address any potential hazards and to arrange for either a caretaker or responsible person to ensure the timely resolution of public utility-related issues during periods when the property is unoccupied. It also requires that contact information for the caretaker or responsible person be provided to each public utility that serves the property and the municipality in which the property is located.

LD 1929 requires the Commission to establish a hotline and an online portal to allow a person and public utilities to report hazards on seasonal properties. It also requires the Commission to establish a process to ensure that public utilities and municipalities are promptly informed of reported hazards. The Commission is also tasked with conducting a public education campaign to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining seasonal properties and the impact of seasonal properties on the utilities. It further requires the Commission to provide financial assistance to low-income owners of seasonal dwellings in order to comply with the requirements of the bill. It requires the Commission and a public utility to seek federal funds to assist with the costs the utility incurs as result of complying with requirements in the bill.

LD 1929 also contains requirements for utilities including: (1) maintaining a list containing contact information for caretakers/responsible persons; (2) developing protocols regarding repairs resulting from hazards related to the seasonal dwelling that minimize disruptions to and prioritize occupied dwellings; and (3) conducting annual inspections of utility lines with a history of outages, with an emphasis on those with issues related to a seasonal dwelling.

This bill, if enacted would be a major undertaking by the Commission and it is unclear if the need is sufficient enough to justify the costs to ratepayers. The Commission would need to fund the establishment of a hotline, create and maintain an online portal, develop a process to provide notifications, conduct a public education campaign, provide financial assistance and ensure compliance. All of this would come at a significant cost to ratepayers.

In context of a utility's obligations, the bill proposes using federal grant funding, but if that funding is not available or secured, the bill does not make compliance contingent on there being available funds. This means the utilities will also incur costs, which would be recovered through all ratepayers.

Lastly, it is also unclear how certain provisions of this bill would be enforced, specifically those provisions relating to a seasonal property owner conducting annual inspections and hiring caretakers. The Commission does not generally regulate individual property owners in this manner.

The Commission has not yet conducted a fiscal impact analysis of this bill, but since many of the elements of LD 1929 are outside of the core functions of the Commission, it may require the hiring of additional staff.

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