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Testimony in Support

LD 2112 "An Act to Authorize Municipalities and Counties to Form Community Choice Aggregation Programs"

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Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology,

My name is Heather Sanborn, here today as Public Advocate, to testify in support of LD 2112, "An Act to Authorize Municipalities and Counties to Form Community Choice Aggregation Programs."

This program authorizes municipalities to act on behalf of their residents to procure electricity at the lowest price available. It allows the municipality to hire an expert to manage the process of negotiating for the best rate in bulk, rather than requiring individuals to seek out a competitive electricity supplier on their own. In this way, it curbs some of the excesses and abuses we have testified against when looking at the aggressive marketing tactics of some competitive electric providers.

With this bill, municipalities have the ability to join together to increase their purchasing leverage. Smaller cities and towns can create a larger aggregation program by joining together than they could with their own populations. This reduces the cost of hiring an expert and improves the purchasing power of smaller communities.

We have concerns with the provisions in sections 6 and 7 of the bill that require investor-owned utilities to purchase the receivables of the aggregation program and to assume responsibility for collections and bad debt. These aggregation programs operate in a manner similar to existing competitive electricity suppliers, which are responsible for managing their own receivables and associated risks. As drafted, these provisions could shift costs onto non-participating ratepayers—an undesirable outcome that would undermine an otherwise constructive new option.

A community choice program does not guarantee savings. However, it does allow individuals to receive the benefits of a group purchase without having to navigate the details of retail options on their own. At the same time, customers retain the ability to opt out of the program and take the standard offer or select a different provider if they would like to do so. While community aggregation is not a magic affordability bullet, there has been some success with this model in other New England states.

I welcome your questions and would be pleased to provide additional information for the work session.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Sanborn
Public Advocate