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Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Government Oversight Committee

Testimony of Senator Richard A. Bennett

In Support of LD 170, An Act Pertaining to Transmission Lines Not Needed for Reliability or Local Generation

Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
25 February 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology. I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 13 towns in Oxford and Cumberland Counties in the Maine Senate. I am pleased to cosponsor LD 170, An Act Pertaining to Transmission Lines Not Needed for Reliability or Local Generation.

The CMP Corridor issue has exposed many derelictions and diseases in our democracy. This bill seeks to correct one.

While unhappily not affecting the CMP Corridor, this bill will better protect the public interest in any such future project. It does this by helping to hinder undue favor conveyed by the position of monopoly privilege held by a transmission and distribution company, a privilege often magnified (as we have seen in the CMP case) by disproportionate and pestiferous political power cultivated by decades of corruptive incumbency.

We have all heard the question from our constituents on the CMP Corridor: how was the package of public benefits negotiated, and is it sufficient recompense against the considerable costs and degradations the project imposes? Unfortunately, we have nothing to which to compare the treatment of Maine people except the similar transmission projects in New Hampshire and Vermont, whose residents – simply put – were going to get more than we are getting.

Nothing currently in our law guarantees that there must be a benefit to Mainers for these projects. Rather than established legal protections, Maine people are currently left to breathe through the slender reed of vigorous and uncorrupted political leadership. Sadly, this has proven inadequate.

This bill sets a standard minimum benefit, preferably in the form of a rate reduction, when a transmission and distribution utility wants, for their own profit, to use assets the ratepayers funded. In doing so, this bill would level the competitive playing field for any other developers who don't own transmission assets on which they can piggyback for no added cost.

In short, this proposal does not prohibit these merchant transmission lines; it simply guarantees that Mainers will not be a cheap date for the rest of the region to fulfill its clean energy goals.

I am grateful to Rep. Grohoski for bringing this bill before you. I urge your favorable consideration of LD 170, and thank you for your attention.