



Linda Ball, Vice President of Customer Service for Central Maine Power Company

LD 1328 An Act To Protect Maine Electricity Customers from Threats of Disconnection in the Wintertime Homes and Businesses

April 13, 2021

Testifying: In Opposition

Good morning Senator Vitelli, Representative Berry, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Linda Ball. I am the Vice President of Customer Service for Central Maine Power Company, submitting testimony today in opposition to LD 1328 An Act To Protect Maine Electricity Customers from Threats of Disconnection in the Wintertime

Chapter 815 protects the vast majority of residential customers from being disconnected in the winter time, because disconnection cannot happen without explicit permission from the CASD. To be clear, CMP has not requested permission to disconnect any customers this winter or last winter.

At the same time, sending disconnection notices in the winter time is a critical step to keep customers informed about the status of their account all year round. It encourages customers who can pay their bill to go ahead and make that payment. For customers who can't pay their bill, we hope that it encourages them to call us so that we can talk about assistance or to set up a payment arrangement, or as one person mentioned, to tell us when they CAN make a payment.

I do want to point out that disconnection notices include really important information about the account balance, the amount that's past due AND statements that say, "If you can't pay the bill, please call us." There is a specific date on a disconnection notice, and that date is noted as a potential disconnection date, with an asterisk that points to a statement that says, "With permission from the MPUC, your service could be disconnected on "this date" or within 20 days".

The notices also suggest setting up payment arrangements because we recognize that some customers may not be able to pay the full amount due. The notices tell customers that they may qualify for assistance and, in fact, the back page of the notice includes important information on 2-1-1, the Home Energy Assistance Program, ELP, the oxygen/ventilator program and AMP, in addition to information about medical emergencies and the opportunity to contact the CASD if customers have a dispute. I have attached a sample disconnection notice to this testimony for your reference.

I'd also like to talk for a minute about the outbound calls that CMP makes to customers with disconnection notices. If a disconnect notice is issued and isn't paid and we haven't talked with a

customer, CMP calls customers to try to make contact to either pay, make arrangements, or tell them about assistance programs. We call once during the day, once at night and maybe a third attempt. If we still don't reach the customer to have a conversation, we send a field person to the customer's home to ask the customer to call the company and to deliver an envelope of information including the account balance, information on assistance programs and the names, addresses and phone numbers of the different Community Action Agencies.

When we call customers, we dial the last known number for that customer. Now that number may have belonged to Sally and now it belongs to Martha, but we don't know that unless Martha answers and gives us that information, so that we can make the updates in our system. Or, we might have the right phone number but maybe a payment that was mailed hasn't arrived, maybe it's lost in the mail, maybe it didn't have an account number and so, didn't get applied, maybe it was just a day or two late. We don't know any of these things unless we talk with our customers.

Residential customers are already protected from actual disconnection in the winter, without explicit permission from the CASD. To further suggest they be protected from knowing they even have arrears and will face disconnection in April simply postpones their ability come up with a manageable, affordable payment arrangement while the arrearage grows.

The issuance of disconnection notices year-round is an essential component of communicating account status with customers and encouraging them to 1) manage their utility balances and 2) contact the company and/or assistance agencies to get help to make payments if they can't afford to do so themselves.

We encourage this committee to reject this proposal. Thank you for your consideration.



Central Maine Power Company
PO Box 847810
Boston, MA 02284-7810

Manage your account online at
Customer assistance line

cmpco.com
1-800-686-4044

Date: March 23, 2021

Customer Name:

Service Address

Account Number

Disconnection Notice

Account Balance:	\$1,771.92
Past Due Account Balance:	\$1,514.80
Amount to stop disconnection:	\$1,514.80
Potential Disconnection Date*:	04/08/2021

If you have already paid your bill, thank you, and please disregard this notice.

Kindly pay the amount to stop disconnection as noted above before the potential disconnection date. We offer convenient options so that you may pay online at cmpco.com/paytoday, via our **automated phone system at 1.800.750.4000, option 2, on our mobile app (search for Central Maine Power in your app store)**, or at an authorized payment agency. Our system will be updated as soon as this payment is made. Thank you.

If you are unable to pay your amount due, please call us at 1-800-686-4044 to discuss a payment arrangement that may allow you to pay your balance in reasonable weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly installments. We may also offer you a levelized winter payment arrangement which projects your usage through next September plus your current balance when considering a monthly payment.

**You may qualify for benefits to help you pay your electricity bill.
See other side for more information.**

* With permission from the Maine Public Utilities Commission, your service could be disconnected on 04/08/2021 or within 20 business days of that date.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Please return this stub with your payment. Please allow 7 to 10 business days for processing. Do not send cash or coins, and do not return with staples or paper clips. Thank you.

Central Maine Power
PO Box 847810
Boston, MA 02284-7810

Account Number
[REDACTED]
Date Due
04/08/2021
Amount Due
\$1,514.80
Amount Paid

Please do not write below this line

1004082100 [REDACTED]

You may qualify for benefits to help you pay your electricity bill

You may be entitled to benefits from State or local government agencies or other private sources to help pay your utility bills

Call 2-1-1 for more information

If you or someone you know needs help, call **2-1-1** or visit 211maine.org for information about energy assistance available throughout Maine. **2-1-1** is Maine's 24/7 health and human services information and referral system

Contact your local Community Action Program (CAP) Agency to apply for these benefits:

Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) - This program offers financial assistance for heating costs and energy improvements at no cost to qualified low-income customers

Electricity Lifeline Program (ELP) - This program offers qualified low-income customers a credit on their electricity bill based on household income and estimated electricity usage

Oxygen Pump/Ventilator Assistance Program - Customers who qualify for CMP's Electricity Lifeline Program may also be eligible to participate in our Oxygen Pump/Ventilator Assistance Program.

Arrearage Management Program (AMP) – Customers who qualify for LIHEAP may also be eligible to participate in CMP's AMP, designed to reduce arrears for eligible customers who make on time monthly payments for their current bills

Summary of your rights and responsibilities

Medical Emergencies

If you are a residential customer and you notify us of a medical emergency at your location, we may not disconnect your service if the medical emergency is certified by a physician. You have 3 business days for the medical emergency to be certified by a physician or a physician's agent.

Disconnection of Service

We now have the ability to remotely disconnect a meter.

Reconnection of Service

If your service is disconnected, you will be charged a reconnection fee of \$12 for standard meters and \$35 for nonstandard meters. If payment or a payment arrangement is made when a CMP employee visits your service location to disconnect service, we may charge an additional \$10 fee. We may also require you to pay a security deposit equal to your two highest consecutive bills in the last 12 months. Our business hours are Monday - Friday, 7.30 am - 6 pm. If your service is disconnected, we will make every attempt to reconnect service on the same day the request to reconnect is received. For requests made after 5 pm or on weekends and holidays, service must be reconnected by 5 pm the next business day. Non-emergency requests may be deferred until business hours. For your safety, we recommend that the main breaker is turned off prior to any reconnection of service. Appliances that may have been left on will resume operation once the service is turned on.

Billing Disputes

If any of the information on the front of this notice is incorrect, please call us at **800.686.4044 (residential customers)** or **800.565.3181 (business customers)**. We will investigate and respond to your concerns. If you are not satisfied with our response, you have the right to appeal to the Consumer Assistance and Safety Division, Maine Public Utilities Commission (MPUC), 18 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333-0018, telephone 207 287 3831 or 800 452 4699, or email to CASD.PUC@Maine.gov. Please give us the opportunity to respond to your concerns before submitting a dispute to the MPUC.