

April 13, 2021

Good morning Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology.

My name is Japhet Els and I am the Outreach Director for AARP in Maine, representing more than 200,000 members 50+ statewide. AARP is a non-profit, non-partisan member organization representing the interests of 50+ Mainers and their families.

Prior to the pandemic older Mainers faced economic hardships, and now they are struggling even more. With nearly 30% of Mainers over 65 relying almost entirely on a monthly Social Security check, the cost of electric bills are just one of many basic necessities that can never be taken for granted.

We support the intent of LD 1328 and any effort to make sure communications with from electric utilities are clear, not /adding any confusion or unnecessary fear. These disconnection notices are used by all Maine's electric utilities to trigger contact with the customer and negotiate payment plans. In some cases these notices can be used to obtain "emergency" assistance to help pay the electric bill from towns and state agencies. Therefore, it is clear that some sort of communication must be issued that informs the customer of the obligation to pay or enter into a payment plan and avoid the potential that the utilities can and sometimes do file for permission to actually disconnect in the winter with the Public Utilities Commission. It is not clear that such a notice can avoid the potential for suggesting that disconnection could occur under certain circumstances. Finally, the Committee should weigh the costs of adopting this bill as proposed since it will surely require additional costs by utilities to adopt different communications with their customers. We note that the current notices have been approved by the Commission and are typical of electric utilities in other New England states where winter disconnection protections also are in effect.

We would also like to raise the issue of why this bill is directed solely to electric utilities since telecommunications providers, internet service providers, water, and gas utilities issue disconnection notices during the winter period.

However, the underlying issue behind the one raised by LD 1328 is that of cost for Maine rate payers. Utility costs remain high in Maine and the financial impacts are felt by those living on a fixed income. Maine's average residential electrical rates remain more than 23% higher than the average national electrical rate, ranking Maine tenth in the nation. The issues around electrical

service disconnection is directly related to the rising residential rates and the economic stress they put on all Mainers, but especially those on a fixed income.

We are happy to answer any questions or provide additional information. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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