

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO LD 1328,
AN ACT TO PROTECT MAINE ELECTRICITY CUSTOMERS FROM
THREATS OF DISCONNECTION IN THE WINTERTIME

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee. My name is Debra Hart and I am a resident of Manchester, Maine. I own Hart Public Policy and am speaking to you today in opposition to LD 1328 on behalf of my client, the Dirigo Electric Cooperative.

Chapter 815 of the Maine Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) Rules addresses the collection process during the November 15 to April 15 time period. In order to disconnect an account for non-payment, during this time period, a utility must submit a waiver to the Consumer Assistance and Security Division (CASD) of the MPUC. Prior to requesting permission to disconnect, the utility is required to attempt to make contact with the consumer. Through the waiver process the consumer receives written communications from the utility and the CASD. The main objective is to make contact with the consumer, such that the consumer can be put on a payment arrangement.

Again Chapter 815 has very explicit rules and processes that must be followed. I am sure the MPUC will provide the Committee with an in depth description of Chapter 815.

Based on the experience of at least one of the COUs, many consumers do not pay until a disconnect notice is received. Not sending a disconnect notice can lead to consumers not paying the electric bill, which will result in large balances being accumulated.

Having a consumer in receipt of a disconnect notice is a means for the consumer to receive forms of financial assistance.

The position of the COUs is based on their belief that communicating with a consumer with an overdue bill, and yes even in the wintertime, is not intended to be seen as a threat of disconnection but more a

- *Means to make establish contact with the consumer.*

- *Receive payment for the past due amount or establish a payment arrangement for the amount owed.*

An objective is to have the above occur, before the amount owed becomes too large and overwhelming to the consumer. There are many consumers who have not made a payment on their electric bill since prior to summer or fall. There is even a case of a consumer not making a payment since December 2019.

Sending a disconnect notice is an important part of the overall collection process.