

Mikki Rice
Freeman Township

Dear Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and other distinguished members of the Energy, Utility, and Technology Committee. My name is Mikki Rice and I live in Freeman Twp. Maine (in Franklin County). I am writing to you in support of LD 1328 "An Act To Protect Maine Electricity Customers from Threats of Disconnection in the Wintertime". I am in support of this legislation because the disconnection notices are an unnecessary lie by the Utility companies that cause stress and unneeded hardships.

I am a mother of 3 and am unemployed by this pandemic. I was a server when the pandemic hit and now, not only are there no server jobs available because the pandemic eviscerated the foodservice sector, but I can't find a job in my field prior to waitressing, because I can't find a place that can compromise on my schedule with 3 school-aged kids (1 week they may have 2 in-person days and the next they have 0 in-person days). It's hard to be a teacher and a full time worker at the same time.

With the changes in unemployment that have taken place over the last year, I have gotten behind on my bill a couple of times. As soon as my bill was a month late I would receive a disconnection notice saying that I must call CMP to set up a payment arrangement or face disconnection. I know now that they cannot disconnect me so I ignore the notices, but the first time that I received a disconnect notice in the winter I didn't know that.

Someone living from paycheck to paycheck with kids knows that the stress of being behind on bills is enough to give people permanent high blood pressure then add the constant worry about your lights getting shut off in -15 degree weather. it's enough to throw you over the edge into a crisis.

The first time I received a notice for disconnection in the winter I panicked and called the company right away to make the payment arrangement. I told them I could only pay a certain amount per month to get the bill paid down but the amount I offered didn't satisfy them. They forced me, under false pretenses, to enter into a payment arrangement that I knew I couldn't afford to supposedly stop the disconnection that was going to supposedly happen a week later (or within 20 days of that date). I even told the representative on the phone that I wasn't going to be able to afford it, but it was going to buy me another 15 days to try to figure something out. Of course, I made the arrangement and 20 or 30 days later I received another disconnect notice because I had defaulted on the payment arrangement. Luckily I found out that their disconnect notices didn't have any backing before the next disconnect notice came.

While watching the public hearing on April 13th I heard the Reps of the Utility Companies saying that the notices are their way of getting in touch with customers who owe money during the wintertime because customers cannot be trusted as adults to make payments unless they are being threatened with disconnection. My response to that is that we (The Customers) are not children. We know if a bill is due and by lying and wasting paper on notices that aren't worth the paper they are written on these companies are not doing anything with these notices except scaring people into paying them instead of paying for a prescription or buying food for their kids. Not once did the rep. on the phone say, "We can't really disconnect you", nor did they offer any real solutions to getting help with my bill.

Texas was a good example of why Utility Companies are not allowed to disconnect electricity in cold temperatures. This is why I encourage you to support LD 1328, because electricity companies should not be able to legally send out notices that lie and threaten that they will do something that they cannot legally do. They should be required to seek approval for disconnection from the PUC prior to sending a disconnection notice to a residential customer during the Wintertime months. Thank you for reading my testimony and am available by email or phone if you have any questions.