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April 20, 2021

Chairman Lawrence, Chairman Berry and Members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee,

My name is Barry Hobbins and I am the Public Advocate with the Office of the Public Advocate and I am here today to testify neither for nor against LD 1098 “An Act To Support Rural Maine Residents through the Winter by Providing Rebates for Backup Power Generators.”

The Office of the Public Advocate supports the concept of helping Mainers in rural areas afford a backup power source during the winter months but does not feel this bill is the correct method to do so. LD 1098 would divert significant resources intended to provide cost effective conservation and/or to meet the State’s climate goals to a purpose that addresses neither objective.

The OPA also believes this bill is cost prohibitive. LD 1098 uses the federal definition of a “rural area” which would apply to a significant portion of Maine’s population. Without a clearer definition of who would be eligible for the program and without knowing how this program will be funded, the OPA is concerned that it would require electric customers to incur an increase in their bills to fund a higher assessment from Efficiency Maine Trust. The OPA would be interested in exploring an income-based eligibility criteria, instead of a geographical one.

In closing, the Office of the Public Advocate would like to reiterate that it would be fully supportive of a viable program assisting Mainers in affording a generator for their homes. But this model places a potential burden on the Maine ratepayer and the Efficiency Maine Trust. Additionally, placing a fixed rebate amount in statute creates an inefficient model that doesn't take the cost of the actual generator purchased into account nor does it allow for a way to update the price when technologies change, beyond submitting additional legislation.

Thank you for your time, attention and consideration of this testimony. The Office of the Public Advocate looks forward to working with the Committee on LD 1098, and will be present at the work session to assist the Committee in its consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,



Barry J. Hobbins
Public Advocate