



May 18, 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Committee On Energy, Utilities and Technology,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of LD 1708, An Act to Create the Pine Tree Company, A Nonprofit Utility, To Deliver Lower Rates, Reliability and Local Control for Maine Energy Independence.

I am Dr. Janis Petzel, a psychiatrist and board member of Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter (PSR Maine) which has over 3000 members statewide. PSR Maine has advocated for the prevention of health-related impacts from climate change, toxic chemicals, and nuclear weapons for 40 years. LD 1708 presents an opportunity to move Maine's electrical power supply in a healthy direction.

PSR Maine has long recognized the impact of climate disruption and carbon pollution on the health and well-being of the people of Maine (and the USA and the world). PSR Maine's groundbreaking report, [Death By Degrees](https://bit.ly/DeathbyDegreesMaine) (bit.ly/DeathbyDegreesMaine) discusses in detail the risks of respiratory and cardiovascular disease, allergies and asthma, tick and mosquito-borne illnesses and other associated risks of rising temperatures, rising sea levels and unstable weather.

We know that storms and damaging winds will increase over time as heat related to carbon and greenhouse gas pollution builds up in Earth's atmosphere. Maine is consistently in the top 4 or 5 states (and is frequently the worst) for number and duration/severity of weather-related power outages (see Figures 1-3 below). I have seen the toll that climate-related storms can have on the health and well-being of human beings in my disaster relief work in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. That level of disaster can happen here.

Maine's citizens also face the physical and mental health consequences of exposure to temperature extremes, spoiled food and to lack of clean water for drinking or for hygiene during lengthy power outages, to say nothing about the economic losses to businesses, such as to the small grocery stores where I live on Islesboro. With a consumer-owned utility, Maine would benefit from Federal funds in the event of a disaster (which are not available to an investor-owned company).

As physicians and medical providers, we at PSR Maine are only too aware of the social determinants of health, the health consequences related to poverty and to social inequities. People in Maine pay a disproportionate share of their limited incomes for electricity. For too many people, electricity costs as much as 25% of their income, leaving very little for rent, food, medication, or other basic needs. We've all seen news reports of the impact of electricity shut off notices on the people of our state. [<https://mainebeacon.com/struggling-mainers-call-cmps-false-winter-disconnection-notices-a-fear-tactic/>; <https://bangordailynews.com/2021/04/16/business/maine-utilities-can-again-disconnect-customers-for-unpaid-bills-and-fees>]. Imagine the improvement to life in Maine when the risk of being unable to afford electricity goes down. Consumer-owned utilities provide electricity at a reduced rate compared to investor-owned utilities since profit is not a motive.

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In Maine, we see this with the consumer-owned power companies that already provide electricity in remote communities (e.g., our islands and Aroostock County). In 2021, in Maine, electricity delivery by CMP or Versant to residential customers is 58% higher than that provided by consumer owned utilities even in these challenging environments which have no benefit of economies of scale. (<https://ourpowermaine.org>)

In other parts of the country, consumer-owned utility rates are not only typically less expensive, and more nimble in adopting renewable energy into their distribution systems--they also provide better customer satisfaction. Wouldn't that be a positive change for Maine, since CMP and Versant are consistently at the bottom of ratings based on JD Powers surveys!

To meet the challenges of climate disruption, we need to rapidly transfigure Maine's power grid to accommodate renewable energy. Solar power is currently the least expensive source of energy, and the cost continues to fall. Rooftop solar alone has the potential to meet an estimated 60% of Maine's electricity demand (second only to California which could meet 74% of its needs) [*Pieter Gagnon et al 2018 Environ. Res. Lett. 13 024027—based on this research report, Maine has the potential to generate 7.1 Terawatts per year on its 45 million square meters of suitable rooftops. A terawatt is a million megawatts*]. Community solar farms add even more potential for Maine to make clean power close to home, to say nothing of the exciting opportunity for wind power in our state.

Despite years of available information about climate disruption, and the availability of affordable solar and wind technology, Maine's investor-owned utilities have not planned ahead or managed to modernize in response to the times.

CMP appears to be unable to get its act together to accept this clean, inexpensive electricity. We know that the investor-owned utilities in Maine have given conflicting information to community solar projects, delaying development and adding to the expense.

<https://www.pressherald.com/2021/02/04/maines-solar-industry-baffled-angry-over-cmp-substation-shortfalls/>;
<https://www.pressherald.com/2021/02/10/under-pressure-cmp-says-it-can-do-faster-cheaper-solar-hookups/>;
<https://bangordailynews.com/2021/02/11/business/cmeps-solar-energy-controversy-prompts-multiple-state-probes-into-maines-electric-grid/>].

Maine consumers want clean, affordable, reliable electricity from renewable sources. A consumer-owned utility's one purpose is to be responsive to its consumers' needs. From its inception, one of the goals of Pine Tree Power Company is to assist our state in "meeting climate action plan goals." With low interest rates to keep costs down, no money siphoned off to pay investors a guaranteed profit, and the need to rapidly green up our electricity distribution system, creating the consumer owned Pine Tree Power Company is a winner for Maine's people, and for their health and the health of our state, our country and our planet.

To summarize:

Because of Pine Tree Power's potential to improve the health and well-being of the people of Maine with more affordable electricity leading to an improved ability for people to meet their basic needs (which improves the social determinants of health); to more rapidly move us toward a clean energy grid (which gets at the underlying disease of climate change); and to reduce the direct mental and physical health risks of power outages and weather-related disasters experienced by the people of Maine, PSR Maine supports passage of this bill to create Pine Tree Power Company, a consumer-owned electric company.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. PSR urges you to vote yes on LD 1708.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Average number of power outages per customer, states with the highest number compared to states with the lowest number of outages per customer, 2019 data

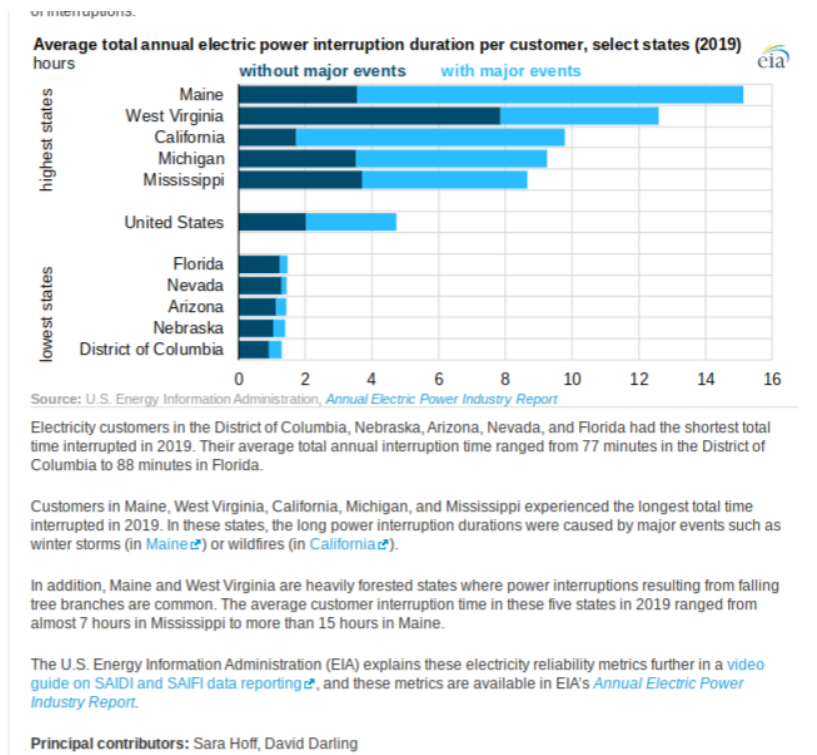


Figure 2. Duration of Power outages by state, 2018 data

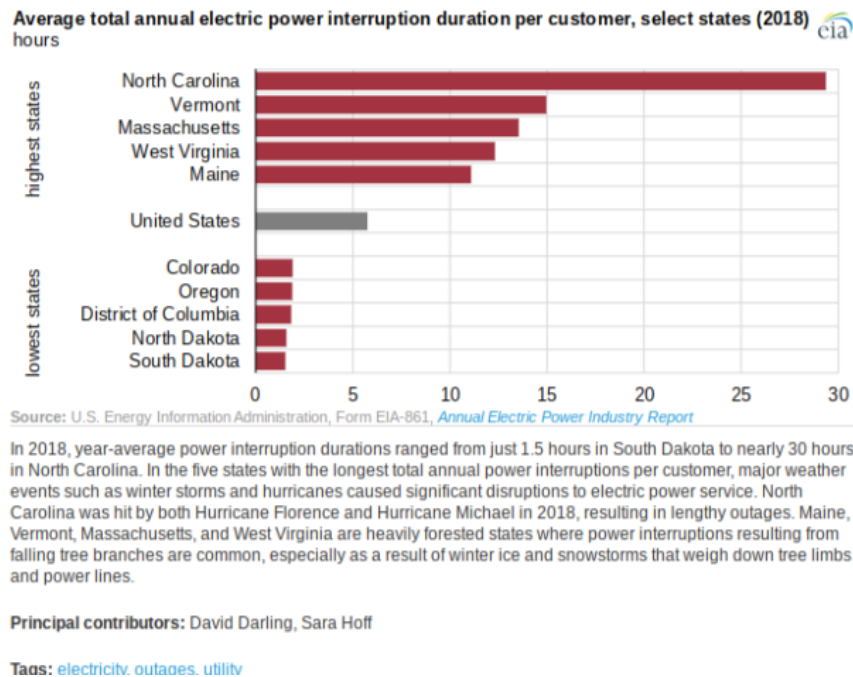
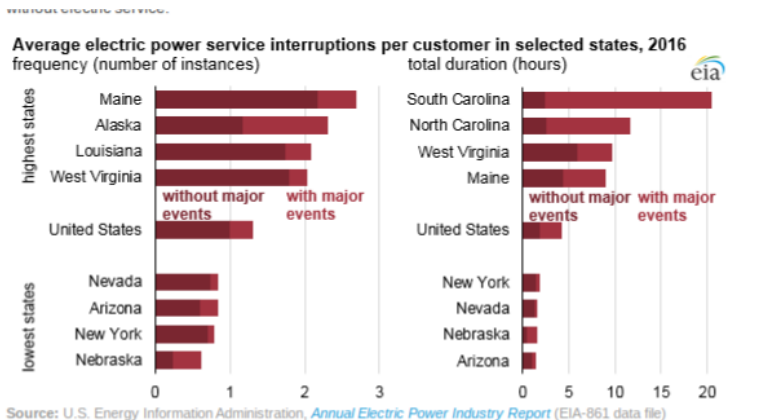


Figure 3. Electric power service disruptions per customer, 2016 data
<https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=35652>



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Annual Electric Power Industry Report* (EIA-861 data file)

In 2016, when major events are excluded, the average U.S. electricity customer was without power for 112 minutes and experienced one outage. When major events are included, the numbers increase by 138 minutes without power and 0.3 outage occurrences to a total of 250 minutes and 1.3 outages.

Excluding major events, the average electricity customer outage durations in 2016 ranged from 27 minutes in Nebraska to 6 hours in West Virginia. When major events are included, [Hurricane Matthew caused South Carolina's power outage](#) duration to be the highest in the nation for 2016, averaging more than 20 hours per customer.

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