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Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee, thank you for hosting this public hearing. My name is Christina Boutin, and I'm writing in from Portland to express support for LD #1708. I believe that establishing a consumer-owned utility is not some far off dream but a feasible and a practical solution that Mainers support. There is no reason to wait on this transition to public power when we know it will establish lasting changes for the future of our state.

I want to highlight the fact that power outages and high electricity costs disproportionately affect people who are already at an economic disadvantage. As you have heard from other testimonies, for some, losing power unexpectedly can be an inconvenience while for many others it can lead to serious consequences. It can mean not having access to medical equipment, or losing a job, or losing access to water and other basic necessities. When people are already in an insecure economic situation, they can't afford to spend extra to remedy these problems when they arise. What I'm trying to say is, this burden is not distributed evenly. For example, 37% of Black or African American Mainers live below the poverty level, compared to 11.6% of white Mainers, (1) and thus heavily bear the burden of energy poverty. It makes no sense to put more of a burden on the people already struggling, when we could have a consumer owned utility that would be more reliable and equitable. As it is right now, electricity, a basic necessity, is being distributed based on profit. I believe this bill is an opportunity to turn this around, and we have a responsibility to do so as soon as possible.

We already know that consumer-owned utilities work. CMP and Versant have argued a COU would be risky unknown territory -- yet 49 million Americans, about 1 in 7, are already served by consumer-owned utilities with excellence. Let's make this a reality in our state, so that we can enable low income Mainers to get out of energy poverty, rather than widen the gap of inequality. Thank you for devoting time and energy to this important issue.

1) "The State of Poverty in Maine, 2021" from Maine Equal Justice, at https://maineequaljustice.org/site/assets/files/2284/stateofpovertyinmaine8_5x11_1-4-21.pdf

2) From the Our Power Fact Sheet, "Our Power Overview," at <https://ourpowermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/OurPower-Overview.pdf>