

Testimony in support of LD 1708 - An Act To Create the Pine Tree Power Company, a Nonprofit Utility, To Deliver Lower Rates, Reliability and Local Control for Maine Energy Independence

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Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and esteemed members of the Energy Utility and Technology committee. My name is Johanna Bozuwa and I live in Portland, Maine. I thank you for listening to my testimony in support of LD 1708. As a researcher at a nonprofit organization, I have spent years studying electric utilities and how much ownership matters. From this research, I have come to the conclusion that consumer ownership over basic services like energy is critical to ensuring universal access and affordability.

In particular, the energy transition stands out as a critical moment for utility transformation where many investor-owned utilities have failed on the job. For example, in California, Pacific Gas and Electric prioritized shareholder profits instead of investing in their existing transmission infrastructure or integrating more resilient energy systems—directly causing some of the most devastating wildfires the state has ever seen.¹ Furthermore, according to the Energy and Policy Institute, investor-owned utilities are on far too slow a path over the next decade to meet our emission reductions targets.²

In contrast, consumer ownership provides a more flexible ownership model that allows us to mobilize toward a green, resilient grid that provides affordable energy. In fact, the only six utilities that have achieved 100% renewable energy are consumer-owned. If you also consider the community choice aggregators in places like California and Ohio, you have over 100 fully clean, consumer owned utilities while no investor-owned utility has met the mark. Consumer owned utilities are not just small municipal islands, either. They operate at large scales, with consumer owned utilities providing all the energy for the state of Nebraska and most of Tennessee.

The Pine Tree Power Company could be a critical player to electrify and decarbonize the electricity grid—catalyzing renewable energy growth, electric transportation, and efficient housing. In New York, the New York Power Authority—a public utility serving the whole state—launched a major efficiency campaign in public housing that ultimately catalyzed innovation in the refrigerator sector, created a number of good-paying jobs, retrofitted low-income housing to be more comfortable, and lowered energy costs for the state government. This is the sort of investments that the Pine Tree Power Company could make.³

There is a real opportunity for local economic development and community wealth building here, as well. With a consumer-owned distribution utility, the profits currently being handed away to investors via CMP could actually be reinvested directly back into the grid. It could also

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pg-e-knew-for-years-its-lines-could-spark-wildfires-and-didnt-fix-them-11562768885>

² <https://www.energyandpolicy.org/utilities-carbon-goal-biden-climate-plan/>

³ <https://www.climateandcommunity.org/a-new-era-of-public-power>

support families struggling to pay their bills or even support low-income housing energy programming. A consumer-owned utility could also create local jobs. As the American Public Power Association put it, “In an era of globalization, public power utilities stand out in that every employee is a member of the community.”⁴ What’s more, Pine Tree Power Company is ultimately accountable to its consumers, meaning that the people Maine will have far more influence over the transition than with CMP.

For these reasons and many more, I support the creation of the Pine Tree Power Company.

⁴ https://www.publicpower.org/system/files/documents/municipalization-public_power_for_your_community.pdf.