



Testimony in Opposition to 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

May 20, 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee, my name is John Flynn and I am here today in opposition to LD 1708 on behalf of Versant Power.

Whether or not you have agreed with our policy positions in recent months, we hope you will acknowledge that Versant Power is working hard to change the paradigm of how our company performs and is perceived here in Maine.

In addition to the work we have done towards interconnecting and facilitating the deployment of renewable energy, during this legislative session we have enthusiastically supported the deployment of energy storage technology, the procurement of grid scale renewable energy, the integration of electric vehicle infrastructure, and a number of other climate related proposals, all while striving to protect the interests of our customers every step of the way. We have participated in advancing the discussions around grid modernization, Northern Maine transmission, and have collaborated with this committee's NEB subcommittee work. We are walking the walk when it comes to transitioning our own fleet of vehicles to EVs. We have partnered with groups like A Climate to Thrive on innovative projects. We were the first company to meet Maine's net benefit standard for utility reorganizations, and we have successfully met ambitious reliability metrics required by the PUC in our first year as Versant Power.

In short, we strive every day to be a trusted partner. We do not believe that energy policy or energy markets are a zero-sum game. We are listening carefully. And we share your collective vision for the future.

Also, please know that I understand we aren't perfect. We can - and will continue - to improve and make progress. The Legislature and the Public Utilities Commission can and should hold utilities accountable for their obligations to their customers and to the State.

In June of 2019, Governor Mills signed LD 1679 into law. The law was widely supported in the Maine Legislature, and among other things, memorialized Maine's climate goals into law. Under this new law, Maine must reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 45% below 1990 greenhouse gas emission levels by 2030, and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.

That first milestone is less than 9 years away.



The good news is that so much progress is already being made. From the work of the Maine Climate Council and Maine Legislature to countless efforts being undertaken by private industry, municipalities, nonprofits and so many others, we are off to a good start. None of this is easy, but Maine people are accustomed to rolling up their sleeves and doing the hard work.

And we would hate to see that progress undermined by efforts to place our customers at the front line in terms of the financial and environmental risks associated with climate change.

The idea that the government may force the divestiture of Maine's two privately owned transmission and distribution utilities is perhaps the single largest variable in terms of disruption to that progress. To achieve our climate and grid modernization objectives we need everyone working together – we don't have time or money to waste on polarizing fights.

We need an electric grid- poles and wires- that can facilitate decarbonization. We need an experienced operator to ensure that planning is being done strategically and that technical challenges are identified and resolved. That grid and those operators already exist. To inject so much uncertainty and volatility into a this equation would be hitting the pause button on our climate action and renewable integration strategies for the foreseeable future. Who will finance important generator or utility projects with such uncertainty? Who will bear the financial risk of failure? Why are we making this harder and riskier than it already is?

Instead of going down the road of LD 1708 we envision something much different. Progress takes more than money. It takes determination and the collective will to achieve something important together. In that kind of endeavor, there is no room for pettiness. There are no resources to spare on infighting. There is no time to waste.

We believe that we can make real progress *together*. Let's pursue beneficial electrician. Let's plan for future renewable energy procurement and employment. Let's deploy energy storage technologies as a way to most effectively integrate renewable energy generation. Let's make our homes and businesses more energy efficient. Let's have a bigger conversation about what you want utilities in Maine to look like 5, 10 and 20 years from now and implement a long-term strategic plan to achieve that vision- together. Versant Power stands ready to do that with you.

In short, let's get after it.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions or provide more information.