

Sophie Gaulkin  
Harpswell

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and distinguished members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak in support of LD # 1708, An Act to Create the Pine Tree Power Company. My name is Sophie Gaulkin and I grew up in Kennebunkport and now live in Harpswell. I strongly support this legislation because Mainers deserve reliable, fair, and sustainable utilities, which a consumer-owned utility provides.

My mom raised me and my two siblings by herself, and I remember growing up that we would lose power all the time. It would sometimes be out for 2-3 days at a time. Once, the power outage caused our sump pump to stop working and the entire basement flooded—money was already tight, but it caused so much property damage and required new flooring. Just a few months later, the power went out again, and to keep the basement from flooding a second time, my mom stayed up bailing water with a bucket for 8 hours straight. I remember her hands were cut up from hauling the bucket back and forth from the basement to outside, I remember seeing my mom cry, I remember her telling us that, no, there was nobody to call for help. Who can you call in the middle of the night to help bail out your house when the power is out, the phones don't work, and your neighbors are dealing with their own problems caused by the outage?

That happened when I was seven years old. It's been 18 years since then, and the current investor-owned utilities and regulatory framework by the Public Utility Commission are still intolerable. Since I moved to Harpswell, the power has also gone out for extended periods of time. This winter, I was losing power every other week. I've had to leave my home because it was so cold it was uninhabitable. I've had to leave my home because the frequent and extended power outages were making me miss too many days of work.

The lack of reliable power in Maine is not because of winter weather and it's not because of trees. It's because of CMP. The rest of New England also has winters and trees, but what separates the rest of New England from Maine is that they don't have a company like CMP that skimps on infrastructure and maximizes profits for absentee owners at the expense of everyday Mainers—working people, single parents, children, and everyone in between. While CMP's mission is to extract as much money from our state and from Mainers, a COU's statutory mission will be to serve the community in which it operates and provide the kind of service we would provide for our neighbors—one that is reliable, sustainable, democratic, and fair.

I urge you to support this legislation. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.