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Bangor

I am a former journalist with 25 years of professional reporting experience. From 1997 to 2002 I reported on energy and transportation in Northern California, covering, among other subjects, utilities and renewable energy. In the course of this work, I learned that the best-run, most consumer-responsive and most forward looking utility in the state was not any of the three giant investor owned utilities -- Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California and San Diego Gas & Electric -- but the publicly owned Sacramento Municipal Utility District. Ratepayers consistently give SMUD high marks for rates, safety, responsiveness and ease of solar energy installation. In general, the same is true of ratepayer owned utilities across the country. In fact, it's a form of democracy and it should be the national standard in this country which claims to be a bastion of democracy and popular sovereignty. In recent decades, much lip service has been given to the efficiency of markets. That may be true in certain sectors, but clearly not in monopoly utilities. An investor-owned utility and its officers and board have a fiduciary duty to INVESTORS, not to rate payers and the public. That creates perverse incentives to cut costs and raise earnings. We saw the disastrous effects of so-called market based electricity in Texas this past winter. Heaven forbid that Mainers should ever die because shoddy equipment failed and CMP failed to prepare for contingencies. There are many benefits -- to ratepayers, to cities, counties and the state -- of a publicly owned system. Most important to me is the fact that public utilities have been both aggressive and efficient at rolling out renewable energy sources which are necessary to limit the adverse effects of climate change. There are many other reasons to create a public utility, and these are outlined in the attached document, "The Benefits of Public Power," a study prepared by the American Public Power Association. I urge every member of the committee and their staffs to read the concise document, which is full of case studies and metrics showing the overwhelming superiority of a public utility. It is the best solution for Maine, and I urge you to send this historic bill to the legislature for approval.