

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and distinguished members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee, thank you for allowing me to offer testimony in support of LD 1708 An Act to Create the Pine Tree Power Company. My name is Sarah Miller and I am from Camden, Maine.

Having spent decades as a journalist specialized in international oil and natural gas – Old Energy – I’ve turned in recent years to learning about New Energy, including at state and local level. If there’s one thing that has emerged from my work, it’s how badly Maine needs an electricity transmission and distribution utility that helps rather than hinders the transition to renewable energy. Private companies like CMP and Versant almost by definition can’t be agents for such change. A public utility can.

The transition not only involves changing power generation to solar and wind, it requires electrifying almost everything. This, in turn, requires more electricity, delivered efficiently and dependably. At first glance, it might seem that CMP and Versant would want to hurry electrification along, in order to grow the asset base used to calculate their regulated rates. If history is any guide, however, the result will not be reliable electricity for Mainers, much less creativity in how power gets to users in this large, low-populated state.

Meters even “smarter” than those associated with CMP’s billing debacle will be central to the transition in most places. We know how bad CMP is at running them. Elsewhere, upgrading a centralized grid may not be the optimal solution in any case. With battery costs down 85% over the decade, what works best will increasingly be off-grid solar and wind, with battery and other backup. Such systems can be highly resilient — if designed around the particular needs of particular places. But for-profit utilities won’t choose off-grid generation, because it doesn’t expand the rate base.

To date, Maine has promoted solar almost exclusively as a net-metering transaction that leaves everyone in the rate base. CMP has fought even this. How much harder will it fight distributed systems? Despite Maine’s admirable carbon emission goals, it risks being left behind unless it has an electric utility that is a partner in the effort — a utility that Mainers themselves own and control.

This is why I wholeheartedly support LD 1708, and urge you to support public power. Thank you.

Sarah Miller  
Camden

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