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Senator Lawrence, and 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 Jake Romm and I live in Harpswell, Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss what a Consumer-Owned Utility can do for Maine.

As the committee knows, climate change is here, and we are only just beginning to feel its effects. In 2019, over 11,000 scientists warned that we face a civilization-threatening “climate emergency.” They said in part, [1]

The climate crisis has arrived and is accelerating faster than most scientists expected. It is more severe than anticipated, threatening natural ecosystems and the fate of humanity. Especially worrisome are potential irreversible climate tipping points and nature’s reinforcing feedbacks (atmospheric, marine, and terrestrial) that could lead to a catastrophic “hothouse Earth,” well beyond the control of humans.

Just this winter in Harpswell, we experienced severe storms and the attendant power-outages with an alarming frequency. I was fortunate enough to have a generator to maintain my home’s heat during these outages, on one occasion, the generator broke down and I had to find a place to stay. I was lucky—if I had no place else to go I would have been stuck in my home, worrying about freezing. Unfortunately, this is the reality for many Mainers. Mainers shouldn’t need to pay for costly generators on top of their utility bills just to keep the heat on. What’s more, severe and unpredictable weather events are only likely to increase as the climate crisis advances and Maine’s for-profit utilities are clearly ill-equipped to handle the weather.

Not only is our current for-profit power grid not equipped to meet the challenges posed by the climate crisis, it is actively contributing to it. Despite scientific warnings of catastrophic risk, Maine’s for-profit utilities have done little or nothing to help Maine shift to high end-use efficiency, electrified heating and transport, distributed solar and wind generation, and a smart grid bolstered by energy storage—measures that would not only fight climate change but benefit Mainers in the near term through lower costs, increased reliability, and energy independence. We need a COU because one of its built-in missions will be to fight climate change.

I support LD #1708 because it would replace CMP and Versant, which are foreign owned, unreliable, and expensive, with a Consumer-Owned Utility that is local, reliable, low cost, capable of addressing the climate crisis, and, most of all, responsive to the needs of the people instead of the demands of profit. Thank you for listening to my testimony today. I am ready to answer any questions you may have.