

To: Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology

From: Julia St.Clair-Voiers

Date: May 20, 2021

Re: Testimony in support of L.D. 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”

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Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Julia St.Clair-Voiers, I am an organizer with Maine Youth for Climate Justice and resident of South Portland. As a young person planning to continue building a life in Maine, I am writing today in support of L.D. 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.”

With some of the highest rates and worst reliability in the nation, the people of Maine have had enough of our investor-owned utility companies being in control. LD 1708 is an opportunity to make a change that will completely restructure our energy systems here in Maine. Consumer-owned utilities are not a new idea, currently COUs serve 1 in 3 Americans nationwide and already serve 97 of 488 Maine towns across the state who have lower rates and fewer outages overall.

A coalition of Maine ratepayers, energy experts, conservationists, business leaders, and young people have a shared vision of changing Maine’s energy grid to benefit Maine’s people, and pushing to be the first state to reach 100% renewable energy. We believe in building a system to serve Maine’s people, ratepayers, and electricity users, rather than investors across borders or overseas. The Pine Tree Power Company would put the control over our energy grid into the hands of Maine’s people. It would be independent, not state-run as some in the opposition have tried to trick us to believe, but the people of Maine know better, and we are tired of having these investor-owned companies twisting the narrative so they can continue to be in control.

The decisions you are making today regarding LD 1708 have powerful implications for Maine’s future and will be a pivotal point towards building a sustainable, equitable, and resilient Maine for generations to come. Science tells us that in order to tackle the climate crisis, we need to rapidly decarbonize in the coming decade and push towards 100% renewable energy in our electrical grid. CMP and Versant are preventing us from reaching this goal, instead spending their money on PR campaigns. The Pine Tree Power Company is critical for Maine’s clean and renewable energy future.

The first six places in the US to reach 100% renewable electricity are all served by COUs. I believe a 100% renewable energy future will not be possible in Maine without a consumer-owned utility. Our investor-owned utility companies have shown that they are simply not interested in making the changes that Mainers are demanding and that are required to rapidly reduce carbon emissions, the investor-owned utilities are only interested in profits. Our grid will need serious investments if we are to move toward a renewable energy grid, something that again the investor-owned companies have shown they are uninterested in doing. Mainers are demanding energy independence, shifting us away from the investor-owned model and towards a more equitable energy system.

I grew up in Maine, went to college out of state, and have now returned, committed to building a life here. I am deeply passionate about transforming Maine into the just and equitable state that its people deserve, this bill is just one step towards that vision. A shift to a consumer-owned utility is a bold shift, and we need bold solutions to tackle the climate crisis, but Maine has always been bold. This coalition that has formed in support of this shift to a consumer-owned utility is asking you all to be bold by passing this bill.

For these reasons I urge you to vote 'Ought to Pass' on L.D. 1708 "An Act To Create the Pine Tree Power Company".

Thank you for your consideration,

Julia St.Clair-Voiers