

**Gary Friedmann's
Testimony on LD 697 for the
Energy Utility Technology Committee of the Maine State Legislature
March 8, 2022**

Thank you Chairmen Lawrence and Berry and Members of the Committee. My name is Gary Friedmann and I am speaking as a climate activist who has been working on increasing the amount of renewable energy on the grid for the last ten years. I have served on the Bar Harbor town council for 10 years – but I am speaking only for myself.

My extensive experience with our electric utility, formerly Bangor Hydro, leads me to conclude that foreign ownership of monopoly utilities provides no benefits for Maine ratepayers. It has become clear to me that the primary purpose of our Canadian owners – Emera and Versant – has been to send profits abroad. Emera, and now Versant, have been underinvesting in our grid for decades. High levels of deferred maintenance have led to Versant earning consistently low ratings in annual JD Power surveys of customer experience. We have excessive numbers and length of power outages, and the utility is unable to come close to keeping up with requests to interconnect solar energy projects. To increase profits, Emera cut local linemen and engineers, outsourcing line repairs when storms knocked out power. Now Versant has to try to keep the power flowing through a weakened grid.

Let me give you some examples. When Emera was in the process of selling our utility to Calgary-based Enmax, A Climate to Thrive, the grassroots organization dedicated to making MDI energy independent by 2030, intervened in the PUC case to lodge our concerns about interconnecting medium-scale solar arrays. A very nice man from Calgary was sent to Maine to make all kinds of promises about service and renewable energy. While we testified at PUC hearings about the importance of improving performance around climate-related projects, the PUC had no incentive to build that into the settlement stipulations. Upon assuming ownership, Versant immediately began dragging its feet on integrating solar power into the grid. Emera had left the utility understaffed, and Enmax tried to fill the gap with excessively expensive contracted engineers from Canada who were unprepared for the challenges on the ground in Maine. We've had a community solar farm ready to go on a capped landfill in Tremont for more than

two years, and we're still months away from project completion. These delays are costing us money and unnecessary carbon emissions. While great with PR, their concern for Maine customers dissipated after the merger closed.

The staff in Maine is for the most part friendly and wants to help, but resources from Calgary are not forthcoming to make a difference. A combination of understaffing and indifference to Maine's climate goals makes interactions with Versant around solar projects frustrating and often fruitless.

If Versant is ever sold, we want to know that the PUC will be required to consider the ramifications of foreign ownership that has no incentive to care about the economic and climate costs of their utility operations in Maine.

Gary Friedmann is a Bar Harbor Town Councilor and has been working to bring clean, renewable energy to Maine communities for ten years.