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Testimony of Representative Nicole Grohoski
In Support of LD 318, *Resolve, To Direct the Office of Public Advocate To Study Reforming Maine's System of Retail Electricity Supply to Provide More Options to Maine Customers and Support Maine's Climate Goals*

Before the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
16 March 2022

Good morning Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and honorable colleagues of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology. I am Nicole Grohoski, and I represent the communities of Ellsworth and Trenton in the Maine House. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of LD 318, now renamed "*Resolve, To Direct the Office of Public Advocate To Study Reforming Maine's System of Retail Electricity Supply to Provide More Options to Maine Customers and Support Maine's Climate Goals.*"

This committee has spent a good deal of time discussing Maine's electricity usage, supply, billing and delivery, and climate impacts. We have wrestled with topics like how to:

- support Maine's climate goals,
- increase renewable energy development at different scales,
- deal with performance issues and widespread customer dissatisfaction with our investor-owned utilities (IOU), and
- smartly finance the necessary investments in generation and transmission to decarbonize our economy.

Ratepayer costs are something we discuss daily, and now the conversation is as pressing as ever with the 80+% increases in standard offer rates for customers in IOU territories this year.

Maine has adopted goals to reduce its climate emissions and increase beneficial electrification, especially of Maine's home heating and transportation sectors. The price of electricity supply can delay or frustrate the achievement of such goals – just one more reason to try to contain costs.

In addition, customer satisfaction with our two IOUs remains embarrassingly low compared to elsewhere in the country, so low that our Public Utilities Commission recently opened an investigation into the corporate ownership of Central Maine Power to look for the root causes. Our frustration with utility billing, service, and cost is serious and now seemingly status quo. Mainers have lots of choices in virtually every aspect of their lives as consumers, but not so much as ratepayers. The limited choices they're afforded via our current electricity system leads to frustration, anger, or despair.

No one piece of legislation can address all of the issues we have in transitioning to a decarbonized, customer-centric future. However, it is time for consumers to have a consumer-driven study of options for this future. That is why the study proposed in this resolve would be conducted by our Public Advocate. That is what my amendment to LD 318 provides.

The current system of standard offer service and competitive electricity provider service has not delivered to Maine consumers the full benefit of retail competition envisioned when the state separated T&D assets from generation. Instead, we've seen some consumers be victimized by certain competitive electricity providers, while others are confused about standard offer service and how to try and reduce their electric bills.

More than a dozen other states have full and open competition, which can:

- provide innovative supply options and products to consumers that can increase consumer satisfaction,
- assist customers in selecting the supply choices they desire,
- assist customers in financing renewable energy and beneficial electrification options;
- encourage customers to save money through time-of-use pricing options to encourage load shifting, and
- help promote climate goals.

Perhaps there are other ways to achieve these benefits for consumers. Maybe there is a way to reform our current standard offer system to insulate ratepayers from price shocks. The point of this study is to determine if how we've dealt with competitive supply over the past 20+ years has been in the best interest of our constituents or if we could do better.

I hope that this study will point us in the direction of increased access to renewables for interested consumers and time-of-use pricing to enable people to adapt their energy budgets and usage to their needs and ability to pay. I also encourage the OPA and stakeholders involved in the study to join together to push for widespread adoption of on-bill financing to promote beneficial electrification for residential and commercial customers.

The study as proposed includes a comprehensive review of consumer protections and education efforts. It also requests consideration of a state-hosted website where all providers are required to

post their supply offers, and where consumers can easily compare prices and shop for the type of supply that is attractive to them. I think this could be a very helpful resource for us to share with constituents asking for information about their options.

If we do not make the effort to consider reforming Maine's electricity supply system at a time when all Mainers are suffering from high electricity prices, we may never do so in the future. Thus, I think LD 318 is a timely piece of legislation worthy of thoughtful consideration in our remaining days together.

Thank you for listening to my testimony regarding LD 318. I would be happy to answer questions.