

May 10, 2023

The Honorable Nicole Grohoski
Senator
3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Senator Nicole Grohoski

I am writing to provide testimony on LD 327 proposed legislation that I understand is the subject of today's public hearing.

For the past 27 years I have owned a home in Brooklin, Maine, in your District; I am a summer resident. My home has been a three-season cottage. For many years, I have wanted to install an energy efficient heating/cooling system so I can live in Maine beyond the late spring and summer months. Converting to solar has provided me the opportunity to achieve that outcome and to do my part to address global climate change.

I engaged Revision Energy after interviewing several other solar firms in Maine. Revision Energy has been very helpful, providing expertise and sharing their knowledge. Every step of the way, Revision Energy has outlined the opportunities and some of the challenges. One of the biggest challenges has been engaging Versant Power. Versant's process lacks transparency and, as a resident and Versant customer, I was not well informed by Versant about their fees or their process. While I was pleased to have Revision Energy as an intermediary with Versant Power - the system should simply work better. And the State of Maine and its regulatory agencies should be more actively engaged - and should have greater oversight and the authority to hold energy providers accountable.

Figuring out what Versant is doing, what my rights are, how to navigate the situation was challenging to say the least. Luckily, because of my background and experience, (former Deputy Chief of Staff to President Clinton, Chief of Staff to the Mayor of Washington, DC and counsel to the Senate), I know how to navigate state, local and federal governments. I was able to get answers to my individual questions - but that should not be the test of a system. The system should be responsive to every Mainer. Frankly, the system should work better.

Based on my experience, the current operating framework, the intersection between state government, the regulator (Maine's Public Utility Commission) is not working for the citizens of Maine. There is no one person or agency a citizen can engage to figure their rights, responsibilities and the process for moving forward to solar power their homes or businesses and how to engage and hold energy providers, like Versant, accountable. No matter how good a private company is - and I believe Revision Energy is quite good - it cannot substitute for a responsive and knowledgeable regulator and regulatory process.

That is why I believe the provisions of LD 327 are essential. Provisions that would require Maine's Public Utility Commission (MPUC) to hire an interconnection ombudsperson would not only help MPUC navigate technical issues but also it would assist customers with their issues resulting from utility interconnection - we need to be well-informed about the interconnection process - a process that should be transparent.

Further, LD 327 would require MPUC to hire an expert to evaluate the implementation of the recently passed net energy programs. It is important for the Government of Maine as well as the public to know what has worked and what has not and whether the MPUC has maximized the benefits for ratepayers.

If the State of Maine is going to meet its net carbon goals, it is imperative that the MPUC report the benefits of alternate energy sources, specifically solar. To date, we have learned about loss revenue to traditional energy providers, but the MPUC has not analyzed and shared with the public the many tangible benefits of solar conversion. Accurate and complete information is vital not only for Maine's legislature and executive branches of government but also for the public. LD 327 would make comprehensive reporting mandatory.

Finally, I know first-hand that the MPUC's failure to act on the distribution cost waiver has real consequences. As you know, the cost waiver provides a flat interconnection fee for all interconnection customers who are installing solar. I paid the fee, but I had to pay upgrade costs before I could begin the project. Moreover, and more disturbing in my initial engagement with Versant, the company attempted to include additional fees many of which I did not understand and were not transparently identified. Without Revision Energy's assistance and my outreach to the Governor's office I fear Versant would have continued to demand payment for unnecessary distribution upgrade costs. The implementation of the cost waiver coupled with oversight of these upgrades would allow the MPUC to lead the implementation of the law to its fullest extent.

It is incumbent upon all of us to help address the global climate change crisis we are facing. I am trying to do my small part. The Governor has made addressing climate change a priority - this legislation LD 327 would help the MPUC play its essential role.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony.

Sincerely,

Karen A. Tramontano