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Maine Community Action Partnership Supports L.D. 2067 An Act to Make Permanent the Arrearage Management Program for Low-income Residential Electricity Customers

February 1, 2024

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, members of the Committee On Energy, Utilities and Technology, I am Megan Hannan, Executive Director of the Maine Community Action Partnership, the membership association of the ten community action agencies in Maine and we support LD 2067 An Act to Make Permanent the Arrearage Management Program for Low-income Residential Electricity Customers.

Our state's greatest resource is our people, and our state's policies shape people's possibilities. Some of those policies are geared toward helping low-income Mainers afford life's necessities, including electricity.

Until recently, a person had to apply for and receive the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to be qualified for the Arrearage Management Program (AMP), a long process that could take weeks or even months to get an appointment. We have updated AMP and its sister program, the Low-Income Assistance Program (LIAP) so that people may apply for AMP directly through their provider rather than going through their local community action agency. That said, our agencies helped over 1,100 people in the last two quarters of 2023, with an average arrearage of just under \$2,000.

During the past few years, we had the added benefit of COVID support that we were able to use to help renters and homeowners pay down or completely pay off their bills – this is not longer the case, however. People are still finding themselves unable to pay their entire energy bill, and once they get behind it is hard to get caught up. That is why the AMP program is so important, and it should be a permanent program. We heard that the price of electricity is going down in 2024, but it is still expensive for many of our neighbors.

As we electrify our homes, cars and businesses, we must keep the price of electricity affordable, and as it becomes more renewable, I hope that will be the case. Until such time, some of us need a helping hand, and AMP is just that.

Thank you for your time and attention today, I am happy to answer any questions that I can.

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