

Testimony in Support of L.D. 1611: An Act to Create the Pine Tree Power Company, a Nonprofit, Customer-owned Utility

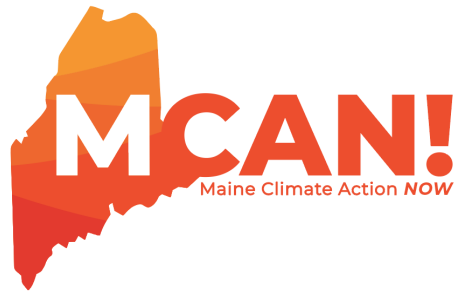
Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Jess Falero. I am a resident of Portland and Climate Justice Coordinator for Maine Climate Action Now, a statewide coalition of grassroots organizations who support transformative action in response to the climate crisis. We hold social, racial, and economic justice as critical to the transition to zero carbon emissions by 2030 and demand the equitable implementation of clean renewable energy and bold community-led action for a more resilient Maine.

As a young person who is transitioning from being unhoused to having housing, and as a young person entering into the workforce I know first hand how difficult it is to make enough money to rent an apartment in the state of Maine. Coupling this with the rising costs of utilities, food, and childcare we are playing a dangerous game with the tables tipping towards the poor. CMP rates are continuing to increase; with the company submitting a rate increase to the PUC this year.

One company that is in charge of our electric grid in Maine, Central Maine Power, is owned by the governments of Spain, Norway, and Qatar. Versant is owned 100% by Calgary Canada. With Pine Tree Power we are bringing decisions about our grid back to the people who use it, Mainers. No other essential service is owned by a foreign company: our electricity should not be either. Maine currently has 9 consumer-owned utility companies that serve 97 municipalities. Residents in these towns own their own electric company, which is accountable to its customers/owners. Their rates are lower, and their voices are heard.

We must invest in the grid to achieve clean energy. All six US communities to have reached 100% renewables already are powered by consumer-owned utilities. The leading large utility in the race to 100% renewable energy is also a COU. Sacramento's COU expects to be there by 2030, decades before Maine.

As of right now, for the richest country in the world we have a poverty death rate of 700 people per day. In my personal life I've raised thousands of dollars and put it in the pockets of young people in our community who cannot afford to meet their basic needs; often including high



utility bills. For three years I have raised amounts ranging from \$10-\$100 through my social media accounts in order to meet these basic needs for myself and others.

I could go on to tell you about my experience of paying 92% of my income on rent and scavenging to pay utilities. I could tell you my experience of renting a room in a house in Portland with five people. Even with our combined incomes, we could not cover our CMP bill. I could go on to tell you the nights I've spent shivering in bed with a winter coat on. I won't go into those details for my own well being and the well being of those listening but what I will say is this:

Consumer owned utilities is a first step in economic justice and climate justice. And nobody should be profiting off of a state of people trying to survive. This is why MCAN is asking State Legislators to put this before the voters and let the people decide.

Jess Falero
Portland
LD 1611

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