



# Office of the Public Advocate

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## FEBRUARY 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

The OPA has been criticized recently for focusing too much of our time and effort on affordability and reliability and too little on climate change.

We listen carefully to such criticism. It is true that for OPA's first 40 years, the focus of utility regulation was affordability ("just and reasonable" rates) and reliability ("safe, reasonable, and adequate" service). And there was no shortage of controversy, as we tried to find the right balance between more utility spending to keep the lights on and less utility spending to keep rates affordable. While affordability and reliability will always remain important parts of our work, the OPA is now being called on to address a third issue – how utilities should help us meet our climate goals. In addressing the devastation from recent river and coastal flooding, we need to be sure that our utilities are doing their part.

Approximately one half of our electricity comes from burning natural gas (and, on the coldest winter days, some oil) which are major contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. We are now faced with determining how quickly and cost effectively we can cut back on burning fossil fuels and switch to renewable energy, such as solar and wind. More specifically, how large a ratepayer subsidy is needed for renewables to meet our climate change goals and limit the burning of fossil fuels to reduce GHG emissions?

OPA has criticized our Net Energy Billing solar program because its cost of approximately \$220M/year is far more than needed to stimulate the development of community solar projects. However, we have supported importing hydro power from Hydro Quebec, developing the proposed Northern Maine wind farm, and offshore wind. In each case we have made difficult decisions of whether the return on ratepayer "investment" in additional renewable energy is worth it. We will continue to advocate for cost effective ratepayer subsidies for renewable energy where the opportunities arise.

In the case of our four natural gas utilities, OPA supports legislation (LD 2077) to pause the continued expansion of natural gas while we study its future role in Maine. Natural gas is a major emitter of methane gas, a GHG which the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) characterizes as a "super" polluter. We need to carefully consider whether it is in the public interest to expand service beyond the approximately 50,000 Maine households and businesses that currently burn natural gas for domestic use and heating. Our existing regulatory policies governing gas utilities encourage growth and expansion. Those policies need to be adjusted, as they may no longer be in the public interest. We question whether the "business as usual" approach of our gas utilities undermines our efforts to meet our climate goals.

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Finally, we believe OPA needs consider climate issues in addition to affordability and reliability. It can no longer be an afterthought in our advocacy. It's now clear that the cost to our environment of continuing to burn fossil fuels and the need for clean energy are paramount to our future.

To help implement this change, I have asked one of our most experienced attorneys, Susan Chamberlin, to be OPA's first "Climate Policy Advisor". In this new role Susan will focus on climate change issues and helping make sure that all of our advocacy on behalf of Maine ratepayers carefully considers climate issues. Susan, and all of us at OPA, look forward to working closely with those, both inside state government and outside, as we collectively tackle the growing and serious threat created by continuing to burn fossil fuels.

William Harwood

## Legislative Advocacy

The Second Regular Session of the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature began on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Energy, Utilities, and Technology (EUT) Committee has completed most of its work on bills carried over from the First Session and will continue work on new bills referred to the committee. The OPA will continue its advocacy for Maine ratepayers on these bills but is especially focused on five pieces of specific legislation which the Office helped introduce this session:

- 1. An Act Regarding Fair Service for All Electricity Supply Customers, (Sen. Nicole Grohoski, D-Hancock) LD 2163.** This bill follows up on our earlier efforts to protect residential ratepayers, especially low-income ratepayers, from the predatory pricing activities by competitive electricity providers (CEPs). It is intended to avoid customers paying a CEP price above the alternative Standard Offer price. In a recent report to the OPA, Tim Howington from Baldwin Consulting estimated that over the past seven years, CEPs have charged Maine ratepayers approximately \$80 million more than if they were on the Standard Offer. This bill has a public hearing scheduled for February 6<sup>th</sup>.
- 2. An Act to Continue Arrearage Management Program Availability for Low-income Residential Electricity Customers, (Rep. Foster, R-Dexter) LD 2067.** This bill would remove the September 2024 sunset on the Arrearage Management Program that helps ratepayers who cannot afford to pay off large arrearages in the amount owed to utilities. The sponsor has proposed amending the bill to extend the sunset until 2028. The OPA is supportive of the amendment but would prefer the sunset be repealed. This bill's public hearing was held on February 1<sup>st</sup>. A work session will be scheduled in the coming weeks.
- 3. An Act to Clarify the Right to Appeal Certain PUC Decisions, (OPA Agency Bill, Rep. Warren, D-Scarborough) LD 2132.** This bill gives utility customers the right to a hearing before the utility can disconnect service. Under current law, the PUC has discretion to deny a customer's request for formal review of a billing dispute with a utility. This bill gives the Legislature the opportunity to address the issues raised in a recent Law Court decision upholding the PUC's decision not to hold a hearing in a billing dispute. *Gen. Marine*

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*Constr. Corp. v. PUC*, 2022 ME 20, P1, 271 A.3d 1166, 1167, 2022 Me. LEXIS 20, \*1. This bill was heard on January 25<sup>th</sup> and the work session date has yet to be announced.

4. **An Act Regarding Customer Costs and the Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas (OPA Agency Bill, Rep. Zeigler, D-Montville) LD 2077.** This bill would direct the PUC to review the role of natural gas in meeting Maine’s future energy needs. The PUC would have the opportunity to consider how much to reduce the role of natural gas in meeting our future energy needs and how best to address the environmental, public safety and public health risks of using natural gas in homes and businesses for heating and domestic use. The hearing for this bill was on January 23<sup>rd</sup> and the first work session was on February 1<sup>st</sup>. Another work session will be held in the next couple of weeks.
5. **An Act to Dedicate the Proceeds of the Sales Tax on Electricity to Low-income Ratepayer Assistance, (OPA Agency Bill, Rep. Sophie Warren, D-Scarborough) LD 2143.** This bill will build on our successful effort last session to secure \$15M of state tax funds for the biennium to support LIAP and help reduce the \$68M “affordability gap” facing low income electricity customers. It is estimated that the sales tax on electricity brings in approximately \$15M/yr. The hearing for this bill is scheduled for February 6<sup>th</sup>.

## The OPA responds to 2024 Daymark Report on Net Energy Billing Costs

On January 9, a solar developer submitted to the EUT Committee a report prepared by Daymark Energy Advisors claiming that the cost of the NEB program in 2025 would only be \$122 million per year, significantly lower than the OPA’s estimate that the program will cost \$220 million per year.

In a January 31 memo to the EUT Committee, the OPA responded to Daymark’s analysis and identified multiple errors including:

1. Daymark failed to fully capture the cost of the kWh credit program because it did not include lost transmission sales revenues,
2. Daymark calculated incorrect variable tariff rates applicable to projects in Versant Power’s service territory, which significantly underestimated their cost, and
3. Daymark incorrectly calculated the fixed tariff rate, which underestimated their cost.

The OPA also analyzed Daymark’s capacity factor assumption and found that it conflicts with Daymark’s own prior finding and appears to be based on a very limited and undisclosed data set. Correcting these errors increases Daymark’s estimate to more than \$205 million per year.

The OPA continues to believe that its estimate of \$220M/yr. is an accurate estimate of the cost of the NEB program once it is fully implemented.

## Federal & Regional

### **OPA Participates in Meeting with Chairman of Federal Energy Regulatory Commission**

Public Advocate Bill Harwood and Deputy Public Advocate Drew Landry recently joined state consumer advocates from around New England in a meeting with Chairman Willie Phillips of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. In the meeting, the consumer advocates expressed concern regarding the lack of an adequate review process for the prudence of transmission investments prior to the inclusion of these investments in FERC approved transmission rates. The consumer advocates also expressed concern for proposals to require electric ratepayers to financially support natural gas investments intended to primarily benefit gas ratepayers.

### **OPA Continues Its Fight Against Asset Condition Projects**

On January 31, the OPA filed a formal challenge with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission against a number of New England utilities regarding their inclusion in regional transmission rates of so-called “asset condition” projects on the grounds that the utilities had not met their burden to demonstrate that the investments were prudent.

Asset condition projects involve the replacement of existing transmission facilities with new facilities that will perform the same function. The decision to replace the existing facilities is based on age or physical condition, rather than a desire to expand their capacity or increase their reliability for reasons other than their condition. Under existing rules, such projects are not generally subject to scrutiny by ISO New England as part of its planning process in the same manner as transmission upgrades. New England transmission owners recently increased their estimated cost of asset condition projects under development to approximately \$5 billion.

### **Maine to Host ISO New England Consumer Liaison Group Meeting**

On March 6, Maine will host the quarterly Consumer Liaison Group (CLG) meeting held by ISO New England. The CLG is a forum for the exchange of information between ISO New England and electricity consumers in New England. ISO New England operates the wholesale electricity markets and the electric transmission system in New England. Deputy Public Advocate Drew Landry serves on the CLG Coordinating Committee, which develops the agendas for the meetings.

The March meeting is anticipated to address the topic of how demand response, load reduction, and energy efficiency can be better integrated into electricity markets and transmission system planning. The meeting will be held in the Portland area at a location to be announced. The meeting is open to the public but requires those interested in participating to register in advance. For more information visit <https://www.iso-ne.com/committees/industry-collaborations/consumer-liaison>.

## PUC Electric Proceedings

### **Multiple Net Energy Billing Good Cause Exemption Requests Filed**

Under 35-A M.R.S. §3209-A, a distributed generation project must reach commercial operation by the end of 2024 to participate in net energy billing (“NEB”), unless it receives a “good cause” exemption from the Commission. To be eligible for a good cause exemption, a project must demonstrate that “due to external delays outside of the entity’s control” the project will not meet one or more statutory development milestones and that without the delays the project “could reasonably have been expected” to meet the deadline.

Although the statutory commercial operation deadline is still eleven months away, many solar companies have already filed petitions seeking good cause exemptions under 35-A M.R.S. § 3209-A to allow them to participate in the NEB program because they already believe they will not be able to meet the commercial operation deadline (Docket Nos. 2023-00328, 2023-00333, 2023-00334).

The OPA has intervened in these dockets and is urging the Commission to apply a very strict standard for good cause exemptions because:

1. The NEB program is on track to greatly exceed the legislative capacity target of 750 MW and
2. Each additional MW allowed in the program will increase the ratepayer cost of a program that the OPA projects will cost \$220 million per year by 2025.

### **CMP Files Supplemental Testimony in Storm Cost Investigation**

On January 23, CMP filed what it described as “errata” testimony, which deleted two pages of its initial testimony and replaced them with 15 pages of new testimony (Docket No. 2023-00038). CMP argued that the supplemental testimony was necessary because CMP discovered an error in the data provided in its initial testimony and the corrected data no longer supported CMP’s argument.

As a result of CMP’s filing, the Hearing Examiners have adjusted the case schedule to allow the OPA and Staff to conduct additional discovery of the new testimony. A technical conference on CMP’s initial testimony and supplemental testimony will be held on February 14 and 16.

### **Commission Investigates Utility Ownership of Battery Energy Storage Systems**

During the 2023 legislative session, the Legislature enacted An Act Relating to Energy Storage and the State’s Energy Goals. The Act requires that the PUC solicit stakeholder input on whether investor-owned transmission and distribution utilities may own, have a financial interest in, or otherwise control an energy storage system. The Act also requires that the PUC submit a report containing any recommendations to the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology no later than February 15, 2024. The PUC opened an inquiry under Docket No. 2023-00316 in order to solicit stakeholder input. Comments were filed by 17 different entities, with comments ranging from recommendations that investor-owned transmission and distribution (T&D) utilities should be strictly prohibited from owning or controlling energy storage to arguments that the Commission should adopt broad parameters under which T&D utilities would be allowed to

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own and control Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). The OPA has recommended that the PUC find that the best course of action would be for the Commission to allow for a limited opportunity, on a case-by-case basis, for utility ownership of energy storage systems when necessary to improve reliability if a market-based alternative will not meet the identified need. The OPA supports limiting utility ownership of BESS to situations where ownership is “necessary for the utility to perform its obligations as a transmission and distribution utility in an efficient manner.” This process will ensure that any utility owned BESS is the most cost-effective reliability option and will not impede the developing competitive BESS market. Both factors – cost effectiveness and no negative impact on competitive markets - should be present before utility BESS ownership is in the public interest.

## **Proposals to Improve Stakeholder Access to Utility Planning Data**

The OPA is recommending procedural changes to the Nonwires Alternative (NWA) review process to improve stakeholder access to data. (Docket No. 2020-00125). Under the NWA statute 35-A M.R.S Section 3132 (B), utilities are required annually to file a 5-year planning study for small transmission projects and distribution projects. To improve public knowledge of utility infrastructure planning, the OPA recommends this study be filed with the Commission and given a docket number. The Commission could set an annual filing deadline, so stakeholders know when to expect the information to be available. As much data as possible within the study should be made public. While Critical Energy Infrastructure Information (CEII) and cost data will remain confidential, utilities should be required to make the rest of the planning document available to the public. The Commission should limit the scope of any protective order and require the utility to file a redacted, public version of planning documents.

## **Settlement Reached in Kennebunk Light & Power Overbilling Case**

On January 31, 2024, the OPA and the Kennebunk Light & Power District (“KLPD”) agreed to terms for a stipulation to settle issues related to KLPD’s overbilling of customers due to unauthorized rate increases (Docket no. 2023-00233). KLPD raised its rates four times since 2019 without following applicable PUC regulatory requirements. In its initial filing, KLPD requested approval from the PUC for the issuance of refunds to customers based on previously and erroneously assessed charges due to the unauthorized rate increases. Under the terms of the settlement, prior and current customers owed refunds greater than one dollar will receive individual refunds, calculated based on their individual usage. In the settlement, KLPD recognizes the gravity of its failure to seek PUC approval of the rate increases and has agreed to conduct training for its Board of Trustees, management, and employees on applicable regulatory requirements governing rate changes. KLPD also will provide a written apology to current and former customers, the substance of which will be agreed upon with the OPA. The stipulation is scheduled to be considered at the PUC’s deliberative session on February 6, 2024.

## Law Court Proceedings

### **IECG Challenges the Constitutionality of the Maine Net Energy Billing Program**

On January 24, the Industrial Energy Consumer Group (IECG) filed its written brief with the Maine Law Court in its appeal of the PUC's 2023 Order establishing rate design for the recovery of Net Energy Billing (NEB) costs (PUC-23-388). In its Order, the PUC required that NEB costs should be recovered from customers through a monthly fixed charge, rather than a volumetric kWh charge as they have been previously recovered.

In its brief on appeal, IECG argues that the PUC did not have an adequate record basis on which to base its final Order and that the PUC failed to comply with Maine statutory requirements. In addition to these traditional grounds for appeal, IECG argues that the Maine NEB program is unconstitutional because it is preempted by the Federal Power Act. Specifically, IECG argues, the program inappropriately sets prices for electricity sold at wholesale in violation of the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government to do so.

The OPA has previously defended states' rights to implement specific NEB programs. In a 2020 proceeding before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the OPA argued that states were authorized to implement NEB programs under provision of the federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 authorizing net metering. IECG's argument, however, raises the question of whether the Maine NEB programs fit within the federal definition of net metering. In particular, Maine has authorized generators to be treated as NEB assets even though they are not located on the customer's premises and may actually be located far from the customers that they serve.

The next step in the proceeding is for other parties to file written arguments with the Maine Law Court in March.

### **The Law Court Rejects the OPA's Appeal of Maine Water Co. Depreciation Expense**

The OPA appealed the Commission's decision to grant a waiver of normal depreciation expense to Maine Water Company (Docket No. PUC-23-101). As a result of the waiver, Maine Water's rate base is artificially inflated by millions of dollars, requiring the company to pay a much higher return to the Company. The OPA argued that the Commission's decision is contrary to the Commission's own rules, failed to use a reasonable methodology to calculate depreciation expense, and is unsupported by substantial evidence in the record.

In a January 30 decision, the Court rejected the OPA's appeal, deferring to the Commission on the OPA's first two arguments and finding that the OPA waived its argument that the Commission's decision was unsupported by substantial evidence in the record. On the last point, although the OPA had raised the evidentiary argument in a petition for reconsideration, the Court found this was too late and that to preserve the issue for appeal, the OPA was required to raise the argument before the Commission issued its decision.

## PUC Natural Gas Proceedings

### **PUC Approves Northern Utilities Empress Precedent Agreements**

On October 6, 2023, Northern Utilities, Inc. d/b/a Unitil (Northern) filed a request for PUC approval of precedent agreements entered into by Northern with Portland Natural Gas Transmission System (PNGTS) and TransCanada Pipelines Limited (TCPL) for a firm natural gas pipeline transportation path from Empress, Alberta to Granite State Gas Transmission, Inc. (Docket No. 2023-00254). The PUC approved Northern's proposed entry into four agreements granting Northern 12,500 Dth/day of firm transportation capacity service on PNGTS and TCPL from Empress, Alberta to Northern's interconnections with Granite State Gas Transmission, Inc. for a term of 30 years. The approval is subject to conditions that, among other things, require Northern to monitor and prudently manage its portfolio to reflect changes in future load.

In its orders, the Commission established that any future filing seeking approval of gas supply contracts by gas utilities must include sufficient analysis to demonstrate that the arrangements will offer sustained benefits over the term of the arrangements and that the arrangements are consistent with the State's climate goals with respect to greenhouse gas emissions reduction. The Commission also stated that it will open an inquiry to gather input with the goal of developing best practices or a common methodology to evaluate the greenhouse gas impact of commitments like the Empress Agreements, their consistency with State goals, and to assist in evaluating a broader path for the future of natural gas in the State.

## PUC Water Proceedings

### **PUC Approves Stipulation in Maine Water Company's (MWC) Request for a Rate Increase for Its Biddeford & Saco (B&S) Division**

On January 5, 2024, the PUC approved a settlement entered into by The Maine Water Company – Biddeford & Saco Division (MWC) and the Office of the Public Advocate pursuant to which MWC will increase its rates 17.6% or 12% lower than MWC's initial request. (Docket No. 2023-00065) Of that increase, 10% of the 17.6% rate increase was approved as a temporary rate increase effective August 25, 2023. These temporary rates will now remain in place as permanent rates. MWC will defer recovery of the remaining portion of the increase until July 1, 2024. Once full amount of the rate increase becomes effective on July 1, residential customers consuming 100 gallons of water per day will receive quarterly bills of approximately \$125 (an increase of approximately \$8.10 per quarter), plus a temporary deferral surcharge of approximately \$2 per quarter, which surcharge will remain in place for approximately 24 months. MWC's rate increase was calculated based on an overall return on equity of 9.50 percent and a hypothetical capital structure of 51 percent equity and 49 percent debt. Under the stipulation, the MWC has committed not to increase in its rates again before January 1, 2027.



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## PUC Appoints Receiver for New Sharon Water District

On January 18, 2024, the PUC appointed Mark Deden, an employee of A.E. Hodsdon Consulting Engineers, as a receiver to oversee the operations of the New Sharon Water District (NSWD) (Docket No. 203-00244). As receiver, Mr. Deden has all the authorities of the District's full board of trustees until such time as the District's board has a sufficient number of duly elected trustees to constitute a quorum. The current lack of a quorum is due to the fact that at a Selectboard meeting on December 5, 2023, two of the four trustees of NSWD, one of whom was the Chair, resigned their positions such that NSWD is now short of a three-trustee quorum needed to conduct business. The PUC's January 18 Order addresses only the question of receivership and the PUC directed its Advisory Staff to continue its investigation of the financial condition of NSWD.

## Climate Policy News

Susan Chamberlain, Climate Policy Advisor

Legislation passed in 2021 added climate change to the issues the PUC is required to address. Specifically, the PUC must consider the state's goal of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions whenever it is adopting policies or adjudicating disputes (35-A M.R.S. § 103-A). The law requires the Commission to "facilitate" the GHG reduction necessary to meet state climate change goals.

As the OPA's new Climate Policy Advisor, I will be focusing on this issue and participating whenever utilities, the Commission, and other stakeholders are grappling with what it means to "facilitate" GHG reductions in the context of PUC proceedings. In a recent filing, Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) argued "At a minimum, the Commission should require submission of an analysis of [ a utility proposal's] greenhouse gas emission implications and should consider approval only upon evidentiary proof the [utility's proposal] aligns with the state's mandatory decarbonization targets." (Docket No. 2023-00254). The OPA supports this idea and encourages utilities to include in their requests for approval a statement on GHG emission reduction. The exact elements of what it means to "facilitate" GHG reductions may differ from industry to industry. At all times the Commission will be balancing what is required to "ensure safe, reasonable and adequate service, to assist in minimizing the cost of energy available to the State's consumers, to ensure that the rates of public utilities subject to rate regulation are just and reasonable to customers and public utilities and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet the greenhouse gas emissions reduction levels set forth in Title 38, section 576-A." (35-A M.R.S. § 101). This is a tall order. Information from utilities on GHG impacts is an important and necessary step towards PUC facilitation of GHG reduction needed to meet the State's climate goals.

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## Consumer Assistance

Elizabeth Deprey, OPA Consumer Advisor

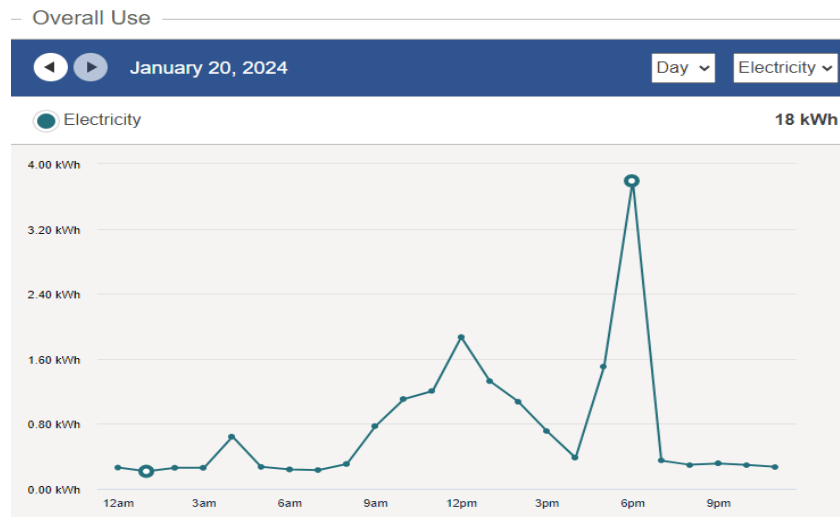
Now that we are in the winter heating season, Mainers looking to lower their electric bills should focus on understanding what is driving their electricity usage. In general, your electric bill is driven by supply and delivery rates multiplied times your usage, so usage is a key part of the equation.

People who call the Office of the Public Advocate this time of year concerned about their usage, often come to realize that the main culprit is a small appliance: a space heater. It seems strange that an appliance small enough for a child to pick up and carry could be responsible for hundreds of dollars on the electric bill, but it happens more often than you'd expect.

I'm not saying to never use a space heater; I'm just saying you should make an informed choice about what you're using. The utilities have some tools and information to help:

- **Central Maine Power** has a tool on its [“My Account” page](#) called Energy Manager that allows you to see your electricity usage by year, month and even hour-to-hour, helping drill down what you may be able to change in your home to bring your bill down.
- **Versant Power** is still in the process of rolling out its Advanced Meters, and therefore seeing your usage data in a granular way under [“My Account”](#) may not be an option right now depending on which district you are in, but they do offer month-to-month usage data and a [“Quick Check”](#) feature to help determine how much energy you should be using. If your usage is above their estimate, they recommend you give Versant a call to help review your energy usage.

Typically, appliances that drive bills up are things that create heat, create cool, or run a motor. Check out the tools above or reach out to your utility to determine which of these things is impacting your bill and how you might be able to make a change.

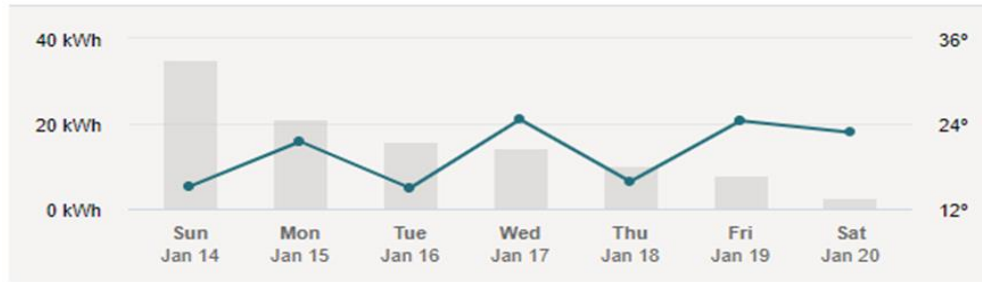


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## Recent Usage ?

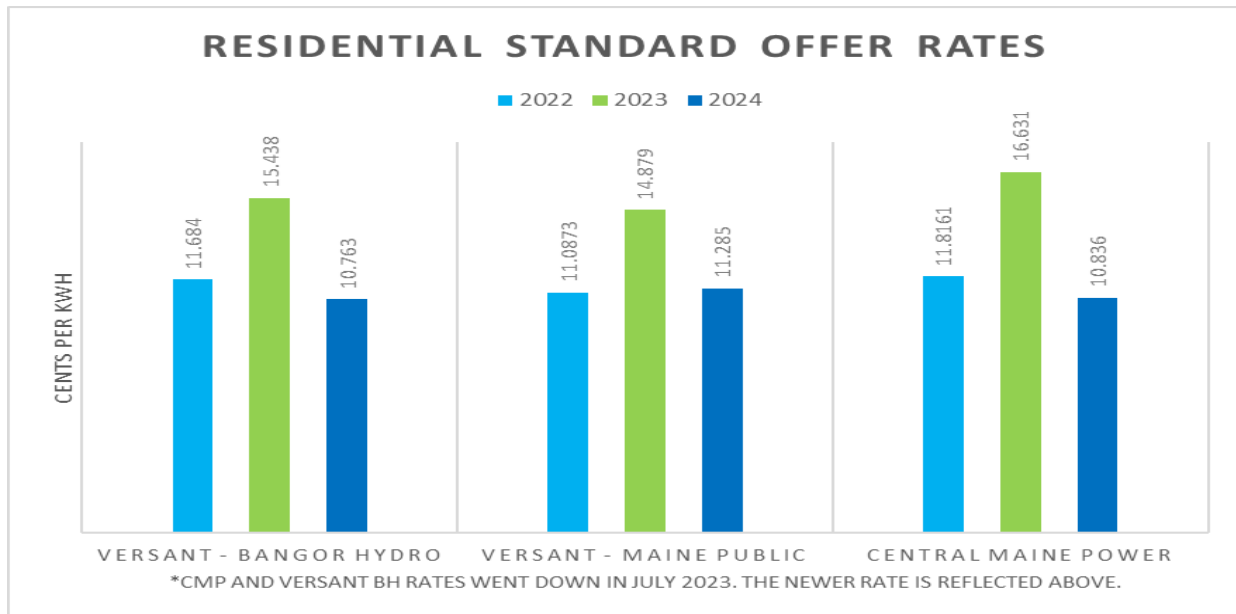
● Electricity ■ Outdoor Temp



*CMP Energy Manager offers usage information by day, month, and year.*

### How to Sign up for the Standard Offer?

As noted earlier in this month's Highlights, a recent report from the Office of the Public Advocate shows **Mainers who use electricity suppliers besides the Standard Offer have overspent by \$80 million** in the past 7 years. Take a close look at your electric bill and make sure you aren't paying more than the current Standard Offer, which went into effect Jan. 1 of this year (see table below to check the rate for your region).



Can't find your rate? Contact us or your utility and we'll help! If you are ready to switch back to the Standard Offer, either call your supplier to cancel or:

CMP customers:

- Call CMP at 1-800-452-4699
- Fill out the CMP [Standard Offer Request Form](#)

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Versant Customers:

- Call Versant at 1-855-363-7211
- Submit your request via Versant's online [Customer Contact Form](#)

Please reach out to the OPA for any assistance or information you need to take advantage of the new, lower Standard Offer. You can email [OPA@Maine.gov](mailto:OPA@Maine.gov) or call 207-624-3687.

## Consumer Corner – How to Make It Through Winter Heating Season

No matter your income level, winter heating season can take a significant bite out of your budget. Here are some cost-reduction tips:

- One crucial strategy is to make sure you're cutting your energy use where you can. Efficiency Maine has an [Energy Efficiency Tips Guide](#) with several tips to improve your energy use in your home. There are also [insulation rebates](#) up to \$9,200 available through Efficiency Maine – that means savings now and savings in energy use over time.
- If you're using heat pumps to heat your home, [CMP](#) and [Versant](#) both have rates designed to help reduce those winter bills. Call the customer support line to inquire.
- If you have trouble paying your bills this winter, the OPA recently created a new [Low-Income Resources](#) page that outlines financial support for heat, electricity, internet, gas, and even telephone.
- The Governor's Energy Office also recently released a [Winter Heating Guide](#) with lots of information and resources – you can also count on them for [home heating fuel prices](#), updated weekly.

[Energy.gov](#) has a number of DIY projects worth checking out to see if your home may benefit, including water heater and weatherization projects.

## What to do if you are behind on your utility bills

- Contact your utility. Ask about a payment arrangement to pay down your back balance.
- If you have a payment arrangement with your utility and you can't afford it, contact the PUC's Consumer Assistance Division at (800)452-4699 to see if they can negotiate a more favorable rate for you.
- Call your local CAP (Community Action Partnerships). There are heating, electric, and pandemic assistance funds available to help with your utility bills.
- Contact your town for general assistance fund support.
- If you are eligible for heating assistance, call your electric utility and ask about enrolling in arrearage management. This program provides debt forgiveness as you pay your current electricity bill on-time.

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## [Having trouble paying a utility bill?](#)

The PUC has a webpage to connect you to bill assistance resources. This list covers all utilities and is a great page to review if you are having trouble making ends meet:

<https://www.maine.gov/mpuc/consumer-assistance/programs>

## [Find Out More](#)

To learn more about any of the cases mentioned in this issue, please visit the [PUC's Case Management System \(CMS\)](#). Make note of the docket number of the case of interest from this newsletter and enter it in the search feature.

You can visit our website for more information: <https://www.maine.gov/meopa/home>

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