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**PRESS RELEASE:**

**Public Advocate Recommends Substantial Penalty for Electricity Maine**

(Hallowell, Maine) On Friday, the Office of the Public Advocate filed its recommendation to the Maine Public Utilities Commission to address the extensive misconduct of Electricity Maine in recent marketing efforts.

Specifically, Public Advocate Barry Hobbins said that the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) recommended that the Commission impose a civil penalty of no less than \$1 million and suspend Electricity Maine's license to operate for one year. The OPA also recommended that penalty funds collected be directed towards an educational campaign to improve consumer understanding of the competitive retail market. Electricity Maine's extensive misconduct, as more fully described in the OPA filing, included the following:

- During a "door-to-door" marketing campaign conducted from November 2017 through July 2018, over 70 complaints about fraudulent or deceptive marketing tactics perpetrated by Electricity Maine's sales agents were received.
- Some sales agents posed as CMP auditors or claimed to be CMP employees.
- Other agents said they were from Electricity Maine but promised lower bills if the customer signed up.
- One agent promised "free service" for a year.
- Some sales agents promised lower rates, despite the fact that Electricity Maine's rates were higher than other available options, including the standard offer.
- The campaign targeted vulnerable populations, including the elderly.
- In March 2018, by the PUC's General Counsel issued an explicit warning letter to Electricity Maine regarding these practices.
- Despite this warning, Electricity Maine continued its deceptive practices.

In its testimony, Electricity Maine did not deny the vast majority of specific allegations of misconduct. Maine adopted a competitive retail market for electricity for all customers with the understanding that markets generally act to lower prices and improve service to customers.

"When rogue actors behave as Electricity Maine has, it undermines consumer confidence and trust in the market, diminishing the potential benefits of the

market for everyone,” Hobbins said. “The remedies sought by the OPA are intended to restore confidence in the integrity of the market to ensure that these benefits continue to be available.”

Because it happened after the close of the record in this proceeding, the OPA’s brief does not address more recent reports that Electricity Maine has been taking improper actions to collect bills from customers and has been reenrolling customers without following correct procedures.

“However, these reports serve to reinforce the OPA’s concern that extraordinary remedies are necessary,” Hobbins said.

In pursuit of affordable, high quality utility services, the Office of the Public Advocate represents Maine utility consumers in any matter reviewed by the Public Utilities Commission, as well as in proceedings before state and federal agencies and courts. For additional information, please contact the Office of the Public Advocate by phone at 207-624-3687 or via email at [opa@maine.gov](mailto:opa@maine.gov).

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