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PUBLIC ADVOCATE

Testimony in Support LD 995, “An Act Providing Funding for Low-Income Ratepayer Assistance”

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology,

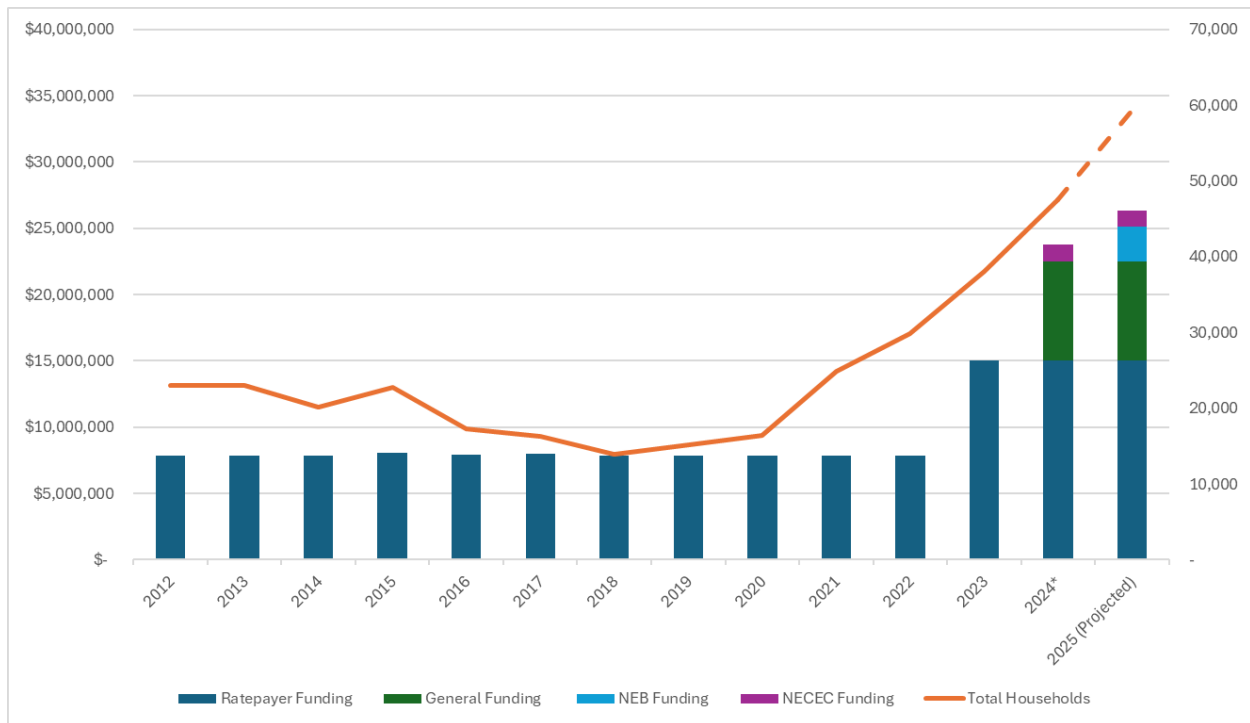
My name is Heather Sanborn, here today as Public Advocate, to testify in strong support of LD 995, “An Act Providing Funding for Low-Income Ratepayer Assistance.” Thank you, Representative Sachs, for sponsoring this important bill. We are also grateful for the co-sponsorship support of Senator Lawrence, and many members of both this committee and of the Appropriations Committee.

The Electric Ratepayer Advisory Committee (ERAC)’s December, 1, 2024 report included details on the State’s annual electricity affordability gap of over \$85M. After years of relatively stable or declining enrollment in LIAP, the need has grown steeply over the last five years. We know that Mainers are struggling every day to decide between paying their electric bill and paying for food. In the face of this immense need, ERAC recommends increasing LIAP funding to keep pace with increasing enrollment in the program so that eligible consumers are not spending more than 4% of their household income on electricity.

The chart below shows the historical funding for Low-Income Ratepayer Assistance (LIAP). In the previous biennium, the program received \$7.5M per year in General Fund funding to augment \$15M in ratepayer funding for the program. In recent years, LIAP has also received smaller amounts of funding from NECEC community benefit funds and from expired net energy billing credits.

The chart also shows the growth in program enrollment that has occurred in the last several years. We anticipate further growth in enrollment as DHHS implements a streamlined enrollment process before the beginning of the upcoming LIAP benefit year, which starts in October. This bill proposes to continue critical General Fund funding for

LIAP and ensure that eligibility (set at 150% of federal poverty level) remains where it is currently.



The Public Utilities Commission, the OPA and all of the participants in ERAC are working to ensure that LIAP funding meets the needs of low-income ratepayers in our State. This General Fund allocation is critical to closing the electricity affordability gap without loading too much burden onto ratepayers who may be just above the LIAP eligibility threshold.

We urge you to support the bill. Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration of this testimony. The Office of the Public Advocate looks forward to working with the Committee on LD 995 and will be available if requested for the work session to assist the Committee in its consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Sanborn
Public Advocate