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**Testimony Neither for Nor Against
LD 1309, “An Act to Increase the Membership of the Public Utilities
Commission to 5 Members”**

April 8, 2025

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 neither for nor against LD 1309, “An Act to Increase the Membership of the Public Utilities Commission to 5 Members.”

This bill would expand the membership of the Public Utilities Commission to five members, with one member having significant experience in the field of renewable energy development and one member having significant experience in the field of consumer advocacy or public interest law.

While we find the possibility of having a seat on the PUC dedicated to someone with experience as a consumer advocate intriguing, we approach this bill with caution and are somewhat concerned about injecting special interests into the very definition of the PUC itself.

PUC commissioners are charged by statute:

- 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.¹

Accordingly, service on the PUC requires that commissioners put aside the lenses they may have used in their past work and instead adopt these statutorily required lenses as they carry out their new role. Designating specific seats for specific special interests could undermine the quasi-judicial approach that commissioners are required by statute to take. For example, we have some concern that a commissioner who was appointed specifically because of their past experience in renewable energy may feel that they were appointed to represent the interests of developers on the commission. Commissioners should be there to call the proverbial balls and strikes, not to represent particular interest groups.

¹ 35-A M.R.S. §101

We are also somewhat concerned about the potential for a slippery slope here. Will large industrial consumers come in next session asking to have a seat designated for them on the commission? Will the environmental community ask for its own seat? Once we start designating seats, there could be no end to specific interests who would like one.

We note that the other New England states all have three commissioners on their respective PUCs. And while the workload of the Maine PUC has grown exponentially lately, adding more commissioners does not necessarily assist in streamlining the workflow and could have the opposite effect.

Accordingly, we caution the committee to think about what the purposes are of expanding the number of commissioners and whether an expansion as defined by LD 1309 is likely to create unintended consequences that outweigh the benefits.

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 1309 and will be available if requested for the work session to assist the Committee in its consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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