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Testimony in Support
LD 2174, “An Act to Increase Predictability in the Permitting of Renewable Energy Development”

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Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

My name is Heather Sanborn, here today as Public Advocate, to testify in support of the Sponsor’s Amendment to LD 2174, “An Act to Increase Predictability in the Permitting of Renewable Energy Development.” I am here today on behalf of Maine’s utility ratepayers.

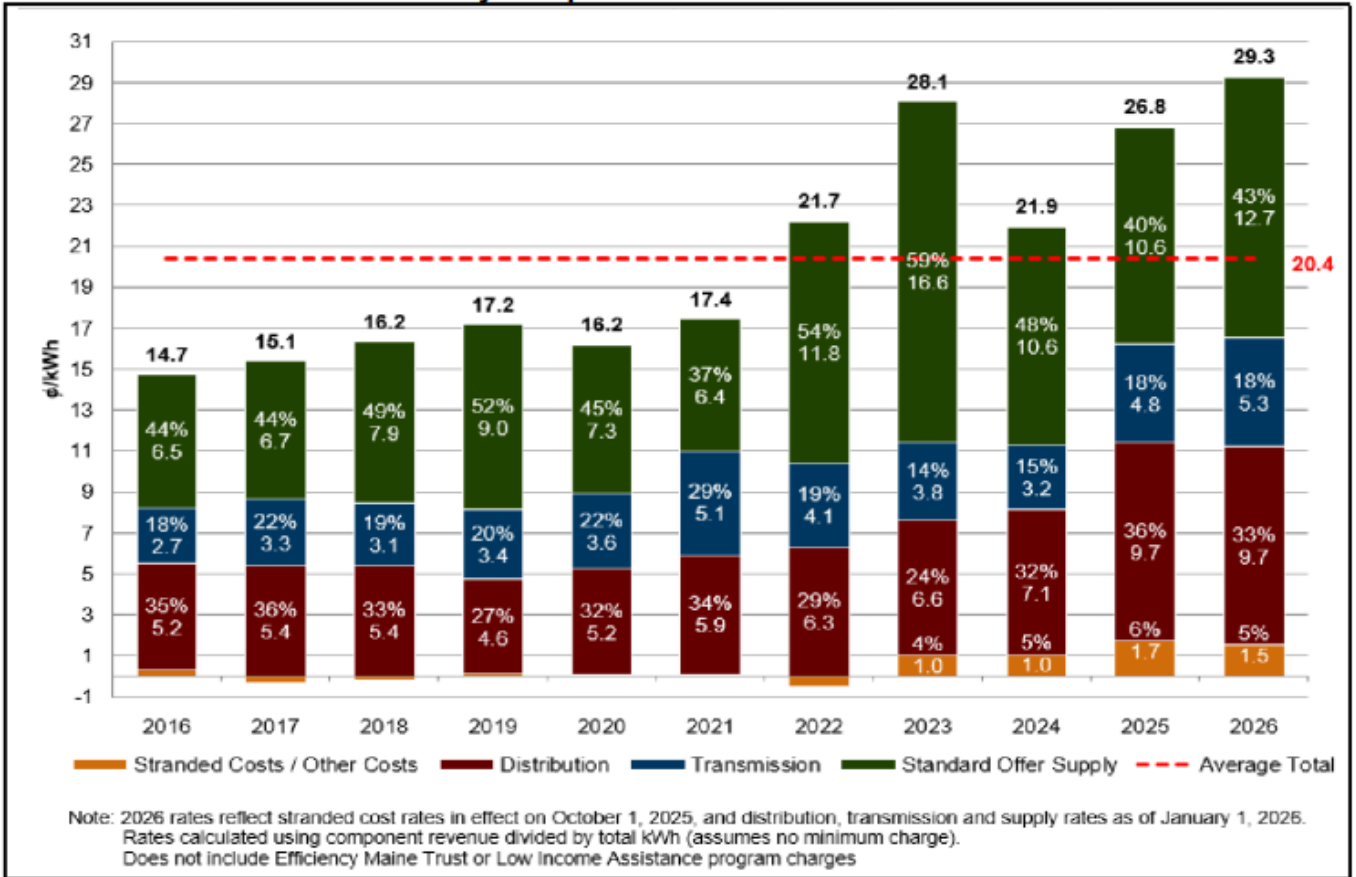
The Office of the Public Advocate represents the interests of Maine utility consumers, advocating for fair rates, services, and practices in regulatory and court proceedings pursuant to [35-A M.R.S. § 1702](#). Our work is primarily conducted before the Maine Public Utilities Commission, with additional participation in proceedings before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. We also testify before the Legislature on utility-related matters and provide information on utility services directly to the public.

You have all seen your own electric bills and likely heard from your constituents who are struggling to afford the dramatic increases in electricity rates that we’ve seen over the last several years. I want to focus your attention on the green part of the bar in the chart on the back of my testimony. That green part represents the cost of the **supply** portion of a CMP residential customer’s bill. (A Versant bill breakdown would be similar.) You can see that the supply costs bounced around between 6.4 cents to 9.0 cents in the years before 2022. In 2022, the supply price jumped to almost 12 cents and then in 2023 it rose even higher and prices have stayed stubbornly high ever since. So, what happened in 2022? In February of that year, exactly 4 years ago, Russia invaded Ukraine and the global market for natural gas went into turmoil. In Maine, our electricity supply rates are still almost entirely determined by natural gas. In most hours of the year, natural gas generators set the wholesale market price for electricity, and their costs are determined by the cost of their fuel. Maine doesn’t really have any tools available to us to fix the global natural gas market to lower those fuel costs.

But we do have a critical tool available to us to make those fuel costs far less impactful on our electricity supply costs. We must build more grid scale generators and grid scale energy storage facilities that do not have any fuel costs at all. As more and more of those facilities come on-line, we’ll reduce our dependence on expensive and volatile natural gas and save ratepayers money. Right now, the mature commercially viable technologies that can be built affordably in Maine are the solar, wind, and energy storage facilities referenced in this bill.

At the OPA, we’re not experts on the ins and outs of permitting reform, so I won’t comment on the specifics. But we are experts on what drive the costs we see on our electric bills.

Chart 2 – CMP Historical Prices by Component



Delays in building more solar, wind, and energy storage facilities and getting them connected to our grid will directly cost Maine ratepayers money. The longer we continue to allow natural gas fueled plants to set the wholesale electricity price in Maine, the longer we will be at the mercy of global markets that we cannot control. If instead we can efficiently permit and swiftly build renewable energy and storage projects and get them connected to our grid, we can drive down costs. As we see it, that is the simple and compelling rationale for this bill and the urgency is real. The affordability crisis is here now. I urge the Committee to dig in and see what can be done to ensure that permitting does not stand in the way of our ratepayers getting some relief.

I welcome your questions and would be pleased to provide additional information for the work session.

Respectfully submitted,
 Heather Sanborn
 Public Advocate