



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee on
Energy, Utilities and Technology**

**In Favor of LD 2132 – An Act to Clarify the Right
to Appeal Certain Public Utilities Commission
Decisions**

Submitted on January 25, 2024

Greetings, Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and the members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology.

My name is Jena Jones and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 2132.

Many Mainers, particularly older adults, continue to face a cost-of-living crisis. As safe, affordable housing continues to remain elusive and inflation has caused the prices of goods and services to skyrocket, many older Mainers are facing hard choices in deciding whether to buy groceries, pay the electric bill, or keep the heat on. The consequences of these impossible choices mean that older adults are struggling to get by and meet their basic needs.

According to the 2022 Annual Report of the Public Utilities Commission, standard offer electricity rates increased “significantly” with some customers experiencing more than a \$30 increase in their monthly bills – and these rates are only expected to continue to rise as both CMP and Versant are working to increase rates.¹ While the Commission did approve amendments that allowed a doubling of the number of Mainers eligible for the Low-Income Assistance Program, we must ensure that Maine residents are afforded every opportunity to receive protections that allow them to exist in safe, habitable spaces.

For older Maine residents these safeguards are a necessity. Homelessness among older adults continues to grow.² We are seeing more older adults losing their homes because of the rising cost of living, a lack of availability of affordable housing, and limited access to the in-home supports that keep older Mainers safely in their homes and connected to their communities.

While older adults are made vulnerable to these challenges, older Maine women are particularly at risk as they are twice as likely to live alone later in life than older men and twice as likely to

¹ (Commission, 2023)

² (Skiba, 2022)

have incomes below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level³. This means that an older woman in Maine is more likely to be facing the challenges that LD 2132 would help protect against.

The due process of law is such a fundamental right in our system of government that it is a part of the U.S. Constitution twice, not just once! Under traditional principles of due process, even at the administrative level, a written decision must be issued after every adjudicatory process so that an arbitrary and capricious decision can be challenged through appeal. Given the information above, the stakes are very high for income-challenged older people. If they challenge a disconnection notice and lose without recourse to appeal, their house may no longer be a place they can live.

The protections afforded within LD 2132 allow Mainers at risk of disconnection additional procedural options for resolving utility bill disputes while protecting the customer's ability to maintain connection to vital services.

I urge you to support LD 2132.

Thank you.

Jena Jones

³ (Snow, 2022)