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Lawmakers Fail to Override Mills' Veto of L.D. 1708; Bill sponsors leave Legislature with powerful message

Today, the Legislature failed to override Governor Mills' veto of "[L.D. 1708 "An Act to Create the Pine Tree Power Company,"](#)" a bill to create a consumer-owned utility company (COU), which initially passed with bipartisan majorities in both the Maine House and Senate on June 30th.

The final vote today was 68-65, with many legislators absent and a bipartisan majority once again voting in support of the bill. Two Democrats who had previously voted against the bill voted today to support it: Reps. Margaret Craven (D-Lewiston) and Stephen Moriarty (D-Cumberland).

Since the bill's passage, the PUC released a [report demonstrating that CMP's management is in shambles](#), and approved a 25% CMP rate hike, pushing part of it into next year. Versant's own proposed 25% rate hike proposal is still pending. Prior to the increases, these two foreign, for-profit utilities charged [58% more](#) on average than Maine's nine nonprofit COUs.

Representative Nicole Grohoski, a cosponsor of L.D. 1708, stood to speak on the veto ahead of the vote: "You heard it from the Chief Executive herself -- our two major electric utilities are abysmal, unacceptable, inexcusable. And we agree on that. But she failed to offer a solution, while a well-vetted one sits before this body today. Consumer ownership is the tried-and-true model that we need to improve our worst-in-the-nation reliability and customer satisfaction while ensuring that we can afford future investments in our electricity grid."

She went on to say, "Citizens are already gearing up for a 2022 ballot initiative to create a safe, reliable, and affordable utility for our state. If the pending motion fails, I will join their efforts to transition our profit-driven investor-owned utilities to one driven by the needs of all Mainers."

Representative Jennifer Poirier (R-Skowhegan), also a cosponsor, posed these impassioned questions to her colleagues just prior to the vote: "Would we trust a

foreign, for-profit monopoly to own and run our public schools, our hospitals, our fire departments? Of course not. So why should we trust them with the grid that will power our entire future?”

CMP and Versant have failed Maine miserably, fighting clean power at every turn and leaving Maine with the least reliable grid in the nation, the worst customer satisfaction for three years running, and the [tenth highest overall rates](#) in the nation.

Bill sponsor Representative Seth Berry (D-Bowdoinham) spoke ahead of the vote as well. “Over three years, this bill has been thoroughly vetted by a diverse group of legislators, utility experts, economists, conservationists, among many others. It earned overwhelming support by the public, including businesses, workers and municipalities; and bipartisan support in committee, and both bodies of the Legislature. It addresses every single concern in the confused and contorted veto letter before us — a letter which fails to understand even the name of the bill, and the name of the Pine Tree Power Company it would create.”

“Our monopoly electrical grid is the lifeline of our shared energy future. It is critical infrastructure — essential to our security and our very survival. Someday, our children and grandchildren will look back and ask: did we do the right thing, when we had the chance? Did we here today set Maine on the right course for future generations? This bill and the coming referendum are Maine’s chance to lead at this decisive moment in our energy and climate history.”

Having officially failed to win supermajorities in both the House and the Senate, Our Power will begin collecting petition signatures in order to send the question of consumer ownership of Maine’s two investor-owned utilities, CMP and Versant, to voters in November 2022.

Stephanie Clifford, campaign manager for [Our Power](#), a coalition of Maine ratepayers, businesses, energy experts, conservationists, and dozens of grassroots organizations said, “We have already begun recruiting volunteers to collect petition signatures and take the question of consumer ownership to the voters next November through a citizen’s initiative.

Clifford continued saying, “While politicians in Augusta have failed to let Maine ratepayers weigh in on this important question this year, we will make sure that voters’ voices are heard in 2022.”

Our Power is a group of Maine ratepayers, business leaders, energy experts, conservationists, and others committed to putting the Pine Tree State’s energy future in the hands of Mainers

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