

A Governor's Agenda for Energy Affordability and Utility Accountability in Maine

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Maine ratepayers are facing some of the steepest electricity price increases in the country, driven by rising fuel costs, aging infrastructure, and a regulatory model that rewards Central Maine Power and Versant Power for spending instead of containing costs. Bills have risen 52 percent since 2021, and roughly 12 to 14 percent of every Maine ratepayer's monthly bill flows directly to utility shareholder profits. These pressures are compounding, and they will not resolve on their own.

The Legislature, Maine's Public Utilities Commission (MPUC), and Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) have shown they are willing to act boldly to curb rate increases and impose accountability on Maine's investor-owned utilities. Even so, in several high-stakes instances, implementation of key reforms has stalled, with the Commission, OPA, the Legislature, and the public each working with less capacity, less information, and less backing than the task requires.

Maine's next Governor will inherit these challenges and a real opportunity to solve them. This opportunity starts on day one: what an incoming Governor chooses to prioritize on energy affordability during their first months in office sets the tone for regulators and legislators and tells Maine's investor-owned utilities that affordability is a first-order priority, not a public relations gimmick. And throughout their term, the new governor can also ensure that the MPUC, OPA, legislators and other stakeholders are equipped with the resources, technical capacity, and guardrails to deliver on the administration's priorities.

This primer lays out a menu of options for the incoming Governor and transition team to consider when developing and implementing their energy affordability and utility accountability platform. These options fall into six broad categories:

- » **Setting the tone early** with a Day One agenda to begin curbing rate increases and lay the groundwork for structural reforms.
- » **Holding the Commission accountable** to implementing key reforms and to the public through stronger transparency, conflict-of-interest, and communication practices.

- » **Equipping the Commission and the Office of the Public Advocate** with the resources, staffing, and operating flexibility to fully wield their existing authority.
- » **Strengthening legislative oversight** of the Commission and the utilities it regulates, through tools that are durable across legislative sessions.
- » **Empowering the public and intervenors** to participate meaningfully in proceedings that determine their own rates.
- » **Realigning utility incentives** so that profit and executive pay are earned through service to ratepayers, not granted as a matter of course.

These six types of reforms, when implemented together, take a systemic approach – addressing not only the immediate drivers of increasing rates, but also the ability of the MPUC, OPA, and Legislature to deliver real and lasting progress over the long haul. These reforms also build on each other: early momentum on affordability (Reform 1) earns the credibility to pursue more durable, legislatively dependent reforms (Reforms 4 and 6); a properly resourced Commission and OPA (Reform 3) are better positioned to follow through on accountability measures (Reform 2); and an empowered public (Reform 5) makes every other reform in this primer durable across administrations.

Some of these reforms sit squarely within the Governor's own authority; others will require sustained partnership with the Legislature; still others will require the PUC to change how it does business.

What they share is a common bet: that consistent attention and structural improvements to how Maine regulates its utilities — rather than reacting to the next rate case or the next storm — is what actually lowers bills and builds lasting public trust in the institutions responsible for doing so.

The tools are on the table. What they need now is a Governor who will take them up on behalf of the people of Maine.

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FROM DAY ONE

TACKLE ACUTE DRIVERS OF HIGH RATES



Champion Key Affordability Fixes

- » Reform standard **supply procurement**
- » Provide **regional leadership** on generation costs
- » Pass a **transmission cost accountability** package
- » Consider **public financing** for transmission
- » Strengthen **distribution planning requirements**
- » Reform **storm cost recovery**
- » Reform **Non-Wires Review Process**
- » Consider enhancements to **Efficiency Maine Trust**
- » Be intentional about **legislative engagement**
- » Consider issuing **executive orders**, where appropriate
- » Communicate intentionally with the **public and media**

PRIMARY VENUES FOR IMPLEMENTING REFORMS:
Day One Agenda, Executive Order, Intervention in Key Dockets, Regional Leadership

ACROSS TERM

STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TO SUSTAIN PROGRESS



Hold the PUC Accountable

- » Build **accountability relationship** with PUC
- » Encourage engagement with the **public interest** community
- » Address uncertainties with **regulators' role**
- » Close Maine's **revolving door gap**



Equip the PUC and OPA to Lead

- » Protect Commissioners' **ability to act**
- » Allow Commissioners to **deliberate**
- » Give commissioners **dedicated advisors**
- » Build a robust **talent pipeline**
- » **Resource** the PUC and OPA adequately
- » Consider a **regulatory sandbox** for grid innovation



Support Legislative Oversight

- » Require the PUC to **report annually** on costs and rates
- » Equip the legislature to **vet PUC nominees**
- » Regularly **train lawmakers** on PUC fundamentals
- » Bolster the utility-sector **whistleblower program**
- » Revamp **franchise revocation statute**
- » Strengthen the ban on **political spending recovery** in rates
- » Give existing **statutory mandates** teeth



Empower the Public to Participate

- » Improve intervenor and participant **funding**
- » Promote **information symmetry** and **discovery parity**
- » Create an **energy clinic** at Maine Law
- » Expand **public hearings** and meetings to new regions
- » Invest in **public outreach, translation and training**
- » Lower procedural barriers to **PUC participation**
- » Rebuild the **PUC website** and docket system



Realign Incentives with the Public Interest

- » Reform utility **return on equity**
- » Strengthen **oversight** of utility affiliate transactions
- » Tie executive compensation to **affordability outcomes**
- » Be intentional in redesign of **multi-year rate plans**

PRIMARY VENUES FOR IMPLEMENTING REFORMS:
Relationship management between Governor's Office and PUC, prioritization within existing PUC authority, budget process, legislation



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