

**TESTIMONY before the Committee on Energy, Utilities and
Technology**

Regarding LD 1248

“Resolve, To Direct the ConnectME Authority To Report on the Progress of the Detailed
2019-2021 Strategic Plan for Broadband Service in Maine”

SUPPORT

April 3, 2019

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and distinguished members of the Committee: My name is Travis Kennedy. I’m the Director of Public Affairs for Cumberland County government, and I’m here to speak on behalf of the County regarding LD 1248.

Cumberland County is supportive of the bill, and we thank Representative Morales for bringing this matter to the Legislature’s attention.

Like many other local governments in Maine, Cumberland County has taken an interest in the availability, quality and cost of broadband internet offerings serving our constituency. We’ve embarked on a research project with the ultimate goal of providing our towns with data and

resources to guide them in addressing broadband gaps regionally, should they decide to do so.

Generally, a regional approach makes sense for infrastructure projects that are sure to spread beyond the borders of any one town or city. Broadband access, in particular, will be addressed much more efficiently if communities group together to plan once instead of several times, and save on costs as wide-ranging as construction materials, legal services, Internet Service Provider negotiations and so on.

But ultimately, success in extending access to all corners of the state - wherever people need it, regardless of zip code - will rely on a statewide plan. We're heartened by the significant momentum in this building to make that kind of commitment, and the ConnectME Authority is the natural home for this kind of broad, inclusive and complicated work.

Asking for formal, annual updates from the ConnectME Authority is a commonsense proposal that will help to keep communities like ours informed on the direction of the Agency. It will help us to make sure that we aren't

duplicating efforts or missing out on useful resources, and create more space to collaborate with the Authority and Legislature on a reliable basis.

The reporting would also be really useful to communities that haven't explored broadband access yet, but will begin to get involved in the years to come - which is inevitable. In most communities, the person who ends up tasked with researching broadband is also responsible for several other critical functions of their government. Having access to the most current plan will provide new adopters with a wealth of history and guidance, likely saving time and resources on a process that can be highly consuming of both.

Something akin to an annual "State of the Internet" from the ConnectME Authority will not only keep relevant parties informed; it will also keep enthusiasm levels up, bring in new partnerships, and answer the question of whether funding and other cooperative resources currently provided by the State are meeting the expectations set out in the Strategic Plan or not. You can make adjustments based on the best and current data, and I'm sure we can

all agree that that's the best way to go about doing the people's business.

Thank you for your time today, and for your consideration of this very important issue. We look forward to continue working with you as we navigate toward Maine's digital future together.