

An Act To Promote Economic Development and Critical Communications for Family Farms, Businesses and Residences by Strategic Public Investment in High-speed Internet



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Chairman Lawrence, Chairman Berry and Members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee,

The Office of the Public Advocate (“OPA”) testifies in support of LD 173 “An Act To Promote Economic Development and Critical Communications for Family Farms, Businesses and Residences by Strategic Public Investment in High-speed Internet” which proposes to increase funding to ConnectME Authority to expand universal broadband and high-speed Internet into rural areas.

This bill would aid in expanding high-speed Internet into the unserved areas of rural Maine, help correct broadband deficiencies and hopefully attract additional federal funding. The additional funding would be used for operating cost and grant funds for ConnectME Authority.

Currently funding for ConnectME Authority is a .25% surcharge on all communications, video and internet service bills which generates approximately \$1.1 million per year. The increase of funding for ConnectME Authority would be greatly beneficial in helping step up the effort in unserved areas.

LD 173 is a concept draft containing language proposing the increasing of funding to reach \$5,000,000.00. Thru other testimony which will come before this Committee and in anticipated work session(s) the OPA believes the committee will be

able to determine whether increasing the fee or if another funding mechanism (including a straight general fund appropriation) is a better path forward.

Thank you for your time, attention and consideration of this testimony. The Office of the Public Advocate looks forward to working with the Committee on LD 173, and will be present at the work session to assist the Committee in its consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,



Barry J. Hobbins
Public Advocate