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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 neither for nor against LD 1603 “An Act To Improve Cell Phone Service in Underserved Areas by Installing Wireless Base Stations at State-owned Facilities” which bill requires that the Department of Administrative and Financial Services (“DAFS”) develop a plan in consultation with the ConnectME Authority to install wireless base stations at state-owned facilities to improve cellular telephone service in underserved areas of the State. It requires the department to direct the relevant state agencies to install and maintain wireless base stations as identified in the plan.

LD 1603 would require the state, through DAFS, to collaborate with the ConnectME Authority on a plan for the state to install wireless facilities on state owned facilities to “improve cellular telephone service in underserved areas of the State.” The OPA believes it is generally a good idea to use the state’s purchasing power in a way that supports the expansion of telecommunications technology and promote the expansion of broadband in remote and hard-to-reach areas of Maine. For example, in the past there was some effort to require construction of new facilities, such as bridges or roads, to consider installation of fiber or conduits that can be used later to build a high-speed internet connection. The idea is, since you are already breaking ground and building, why not make it ready for projects that will surely come along later?

This bill, however, proposes an approach that seems to put the burden on the state to install specific infrastructure – cellular – that may not make sense. If the particular state facilities in issue are indeed in unserved areas, they will not have the fiber facilities available to allow these wireless base stations to become operational.

To sum up, the idea of leveraging state facilities to provide support for much needed telecommunications and internet infrastructure is a good one, but limiting it to wireless base stations, which may or may not be effective depending on the existence of other necessary infrastructure, is perhaps not the best approach.

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 1603, and will be present at the work session to assist the Committee in its consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,



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Public Advocate