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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 2021 “An Act To Provide Funding for Broadband Internet Infrastructure in Unserved and Underserved Areas” which would appropriate \$15 million dollars from the General Fund to the ConnectME Authority for the provisions of broadband internet infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas.

The OPA has a history of broad support for the expansion of broadband in the State of Maine in all areas but especially in the more rural areas of the State. The OPA receives a fair amount of calls from people seeking to get connected and to get better service.

Unfortunately, less households in Maine have internet than those in any other state in New England. As we heard Senator Bellows testify last week with regard to her bill (“LD 1563 – An Act To Encourage the Development of Broadband Coverage in Rural Maine”) high-speed, reliable internet is vital to Maine’s economy contributing to more educational and business opportunities and the betterment of our communities as a whole. The key to achieving this is more funding and public investment is a necessity.

Significant changes for the better have been made such as pole attachments, rule-making and legislation that all reflect that Maine has been working to reduce regulatory burdens in order to expand service. More planning with communities and municipal utility districts have been done but the demand is far more than what is available right now.

As you may recall a similar bill to improve access passed in 2017 but did not get the funding that was needed. This bill does propose a higher amount than the previous bill which results in part from higher costs. Plain and simple funding is what is needed for the infrastructure required in order to achieve more service and better service in rural communities and this bill would help accomplish this.

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 2021, 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