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PUBLIC ADVOCATE

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

My name is Barry Hobbins and I am the Public Advocate with the Office of the Public Advocate and I am here today to testify in support of LD 1484 “An Act To Enhance the ConnectMaine Authority's Capacity To Provide World-class Internet.”

The OPA would like to thank Senator Bennett for bringing this bill forward as well as Senator Maxmin and Representatives Berry and Skolfield for signing on as cosponsors. And a special thank you to Governor Mills for today’s amendment funding this initiative through President Biden’s infrastructure plan.

The EUT committee has been presented with several bills this session that seek to address the expansion of broadband into rural Maine, in unserved/underserved areas, and to the marginalized and/or low-income populations in our state. Each of these bills have merit, but it has consistently been the opinion of the Office of the Public Advocate that one comprehensive bill is needed to adequately address all of these issues to ensure a comprehensive and thorough solution. I have personal experience with the effectiveness of an “omnibus” bill that the committee passed while I was chair in 2013 and I truly believe that this is the best way to move forward to guarantee the most streamlined approach to solve the lack of internet access that has plagued our state for years.

The ConnectMaine Authority and their Executive Director should be applauded for doing such an admirable job. But with the volume of requests for

funding paired with the lack of financial backing to fund these projects, it is time for the Authority to expand its scope and it is the opinion of the OPA that this bill is the proper method of doing so.

In closing, the Office of the Public Advocate would again like to praise this bipartisan effort to increase access to broadband to Mainers who have gone too long without sufficient internet access. Broadband expansion should not be political, and this bill gives the committee the best path going 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 1484, 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