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Janet T. Mills
GOVERNOR

Barry J. Hobbins
PUBLIC ADVOCATE

April 27, 2021

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 1555 “An Act To Fund Broadband Internet Infrastructure for Marginalized Groups in the State.”

The Office of the Public Advocate would like to thank Representative Talbot Ross for the submission of this bill. The OPA is in strong support of the expansion of broadband and we are especially thankful for the bill’s mission of focusing on increased internet access for marginalized groups, especially low-income individuals. The OPA also has the utmost confidence in the ConnectMaine Authority administering such a program.

However, with a \$15 million allocation from the General Fund the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs will have the final say on this bill’s outcome but would like to make certain that this is reviewed as a top priority. The Office of the Public Advocate understands the importance of the General Fund and how many programs and initiatives will receive these crucial funds in the coming months. Therefore, the OPA would be interested in discussing other potential funding sources for this very important piece of legislation.

Thank you for your time, attention and consideration of this testimony. The Office of the Public Advocate would like to be a part of the ongoing process of facilitating internet access to the marginalized groups of Maine citizens and looks

forward to working with the Committee on LD 1555, and will be present at the work session to assist the Committee in its consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barry J. Hobbins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B".

Barry J. Hobbins
Public Advocate