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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 neither for nor against LD 848 “An Act To Increase High-speed Internet In Rural Maine.”

The Office of the Public Advocate is supportive of the expansion of broadband in Maine but isn't sure this concept draft is the most effective way to do so. The OPA's biggest concern is that it creates an incentive for companies to prioritize the areas that are most likely to achieve 90% connection, which are not necessarily the communities with the highest need. The Office also understands that the ConnectMaine Authority has some concerns about the viability of this proposed piece of legislation as well.

Maine would be the first state to adopt a population-based tax incentive for broadband expansion and the OPA believes funding should be need-based to prioritize unserved areas as opposed to other metrics included in the bill such as population density. The OPA isn't opposed to Maine leading the way in promoting programs to bring high speed internet to rural areas in the state but does not believe removing the ConnectMaine Authority from the process or preventing localities from having a seat at the table is the best way to achieve this goal. Tax incentives can promote development of infrastructure however all stakeholders should have the ability to provide input to guarantee the best outcome.

Finally, the Office of the Public Advocate believes that there needs to be a more streamlined approach to addressing the expansion of broadband in the state, especially in rural areas. A more comprehensive bill that incorporates an all-encompassing approach that also involves the ConnectMaine Authority in the decision making process will be the best way to achieve this ambitious project instead of a number of bills that only address one or two issues and create inconsistencies in the process.

Thank you for your time, attention and consideration of this testimony. The Office of the Public Advocate hopes that some of these issues are addressed and looks forward to working with the Committee on LD 848, 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