The 128th Legislature of the State of Maine  
State House  
Augusta, ME

Dear Honorable Members of the 128th Legislature:

Under the authority vested in me by Article IV, Part Third, Section 2 of the Constitution of the State of Maine, I am hereby vetoing L.D. 256 “An Act to Ensure Continued Availability of High-Speed Broadband Internet at Maine’s Schools and Libraries.”

This bill modifies the funding mechanism for the Maine Telecommunications Education Access Fund (MTEAF) used to support the Maine School and Library Network (MSLN). Currently, this program is funded through a fixed percentage assessment applied to voice-related communication service revenues. Because data-related communication revenues are replacing voice-related communication revenues, the funding available under the existing structure is decreasing. The proposed bill seeks to prop up the funding by changing to a per-line funding structure. While I support the concept of schools and libraries being joined together to achieve bulk-purchasing power to decrease the cost of providing broadband internet solutions, I cannot support the funding mechanism advanced in this bill.

The MSLN was originally developed in the mid-1990s as a result of a Public Utilities Commission rate case decision against Bell Atlantic (Maine’s largest local telephone company at the time). The Commission required Bell Atlantic to provide $20 million toward the deployment of internet services to all Maine schools and libraries. A few years later, in 1999, the legislature created the MTEAF to continue the funding and further promote internet services at Maine’s schools and libraries. However, the internet is no longer a fledgling enterprise. The original purpose of the MSLN has been served – 99% of Maine’s schools have internet service at a speed of at least 100 kilobytes per student. The internet is now a mature industry and should be funded in the same manner that all of the other normal costs of schools and libraries are funded.

I have long opposed fees that hide true cost of services and pass along the burden to ratepayers who have no say in paying an increased fee that funds an initiative unrelated to the service they are purchasing. While I also disfavor the existing statutory funding structure, at least it will allow a gradual transition to more local responsibly for the costs, thereby incentivizing our schools and libraries to explore services and funding based on the individual needs and characteristics of the communities they serve.

For these reasons, I return L.D. 256 unsigned and vetoed. I strongly urge the Legislature to sustain it.

Sincerely,

Paul R. LePage  
Governor