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Testimony of AARP Maine in support of LD 295, An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Increase Rural Maine's Access to Broadband Internet Service, and LD 354, An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Encourage the Provision of Reliable High-speed Internet in Rural Underserved Areas of Maine.

Good afternoon Senator Breen, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Paul Armstrong and I am a volunteer with AARP Maine. I participate in the weekly Tuesdays at the State House, and wanted to testify today because I live in Palermo, in an area with poor broadband coverage.

LD 295 provides funds to ConnectME, which provide broadband to unserved and underserved areas such as Palermo. LD 354 provides funds to provide reliable high-speed internet in rural underserved areas of Maine. Both bill are worthy of your support.

Broadband access is necessary to utilize new technologies that improve the quality of life for people of all ages, and that can allow older Mainers to age in place. We hear about telehealth and telemedicine as options for those who can't drive to a doctor. You need broadband for those services! Mainers can connect with family and friends through email, social media, videos and photos. People who are starting a new business (people 55-64 are fastest growing age group of entrepreneurs), will have better opportunities to connect with customers if they have access to broadband. Family caregivers benefit from broadband access, as well as grandchildren who need it for school who are staying with or visiting their grandparents.

A good broadband connection can decrease loneliness and depression, increase opportunities for furthering education, and allow services such as free captioned telephone services for the hard of hearing and some life alert programs.

By allocating funds as directed by LD 295 and LD 394, Maine has the opportunity to increase access to broadband in homes across Maine. All of us need to connect with one another and be part of a wider community, but for older Mainers, staying connected is especially important.

On behalf of AARP Maine's 230,000 members, I ask you to vote in support of these two bills. Thank you Representative Berry and Senator Herbig for you leadership on this important issue.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Armstrong
AARP Maine Volunteer
Palermo Resident

Paul Armstrong