

**Testimony In Support of L.D. 2003,
An Act to Improve Localization of Emergency Broadcast Messaging**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

**Rick Schneider, President & CEO
Maine Public Broadcasting Corporation
January 20, 2026**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Committee, my name is Rick Schneider, and I'm president & CEO of Maine Public. I'm joined by Jeff Mahaney, our chief technology officer, in case you have technical questions about the project and our network. We're grateful to Senator Pierce for presenting this bill.

I have a simple example to highlight the public service value of this project. When you listen to Maine Public Radio, at the top of the hour, you hear a long list of call letters and communities:

"You are listening to Maine Public on WMEA Portland, 90.1, WMEH Bangor, 90.9, WMEW Waterville, 91.3..." and so on. Because of our expansion last year of seven new rural stations, it is now a list of ten transmitters on Maine Public Radio and 11 on Maine Public Classical, and that's a lot.

It is an FCC requirement that a station announce the call letters and the city of license at the top of the hour. These are sometimes called Station Identification, or Legal IDs. And because Maine Public broadcasts the same programming to our whole network, we have to list all the signals.

Listeners complain about the long list. It would be good to hear just the call letters and city for the station you are listening to.

The same idea applies to public safety, the Emergency Alert System. We broadcast the same emergency alert message across the entire network, and it would be better if we could target each message to the geographic region affected by the message.

This bill would fund the technical equipment – mostly encoders – at each transmitter to make that possible.

The main reason to do this is public safety. If you hear an emergency alert that doesn't apply to you, you tend to disregard it, and if it happens too often, the system loses credibility.

While the main justification is public safety, an additional benefit is the potential to tailor other kinds of messages to specific areas of Maine...and the elimination of those long "legal IDs."

This is an issue that has been highlighted by the addition of our new stations, which were made possible by a federal CDS grant for rural facilities. While it is good that we are serving even more rural areas of Maine, the next phase of our technical upgrade is to enable this localization.

Maine Public pays for its programming with private fundraising. But this is a request for technical infrastructure that supports the State's long-time investment in Maine's extensive network of transmitters. Thank you for this Committee's long time support and investment in the State's public broadcasting network, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Maine Public: Statewide reach, local service – and local public safety messaging

Maine Public's Role in Public Safety

FOR OVER 60 YEARS, Maine Public has been a trusted source for news, information, public health updates, safety alerts, and educational resources. Citizens across the state rely upon our statewide radio and television network for essential health, safety, and emergency alert information. Governed by State statute, Maine Public is required to maintain a statewide broadcast network to distribute free programming to the citizens of Maine. In partnership with Maine's Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), that same broadcast network is the distribution network for the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and public safety messages. Maine Public additionally maintains a public safety datacasting network called the SkyScraper system and infrastructure for the PBS WARN system, which delivers emergency alerts to wireless carriers.

Maine Public's extensive network of 21 radio transmitters serves as the backbone of the EAS network, working in close partnership with MEMA. When MEMA or an authorized agency issues a public safety message or the National Weather Service issues a weather warning, Maine Public broadcasts the message across its statewide network. As the only broadcaster with a statewide signal, Maine Public also distributes these emergency alerts for broadcast by commercial radio and television stations.

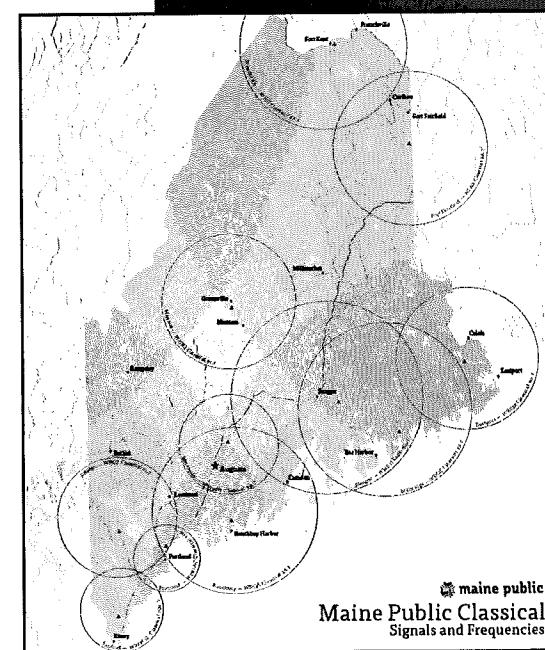
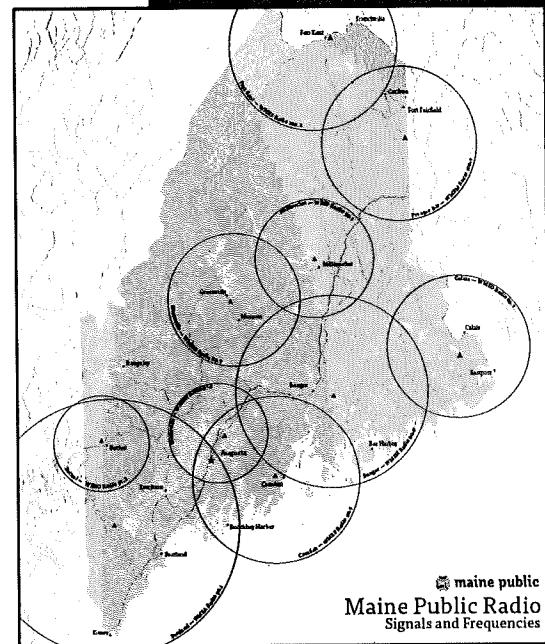
The Opportunity to Enhance Public Safety in Maine

The next phase in Maine Public's technical upgrade plan is *localization* – targeting emergency public safety messages to specific regions. Right now, Maine Public simulcasts programming to all signals statewide. With localization, an emergency message could be aired specifically on the transmitter for an affected region so, for example, listeners in Kittery would not hear a tornado warning for Aroostook County.

L.D. 2003, *An Act to Improve Localization of Emergency Broadcast Messaging*, provides funding to purchase and install encoders and other equipment to enable localization of public safety information and emergency alert messaging on the statewide public radio network.

This bill provides a one-time appropriation of \$600,000 in non-recurring funds. This is infrastructure funding with a strong policy outcome, improving public safety in severe weather or other crisis conditions.

This is a project that would have been addressed by federal funding in the past. Maine Public had an application pending for a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) through FEMA for the Next Generation Warning System, but that program was terminated with the elimination of federal funding for CPB.



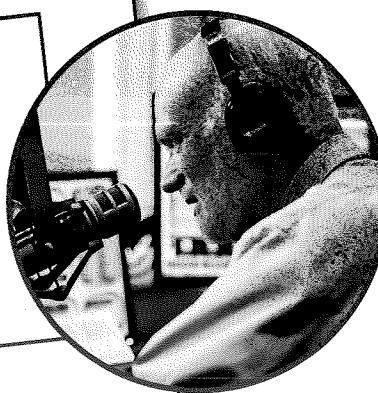
“What’s the story behind the reading of all those call letters on the radio?”

“You are listening to Maine Public Radio on...”

Maine Public Radio

WMEA Portland 90.1
WMEH Bangor 90.9
WMEW Waterville 91.3
WMED Calais 89.7
WMEM Presque Isle 106.1
WMEF Fort Kent 106.5
WMEP Camden 90.5
WBSP Millinocket 90.1
WBEO Bethel 91.3
WMHD Greenville 89.7

Maine Public Radio is available at mainepublic.org and on the Maine Public App.



“You are listening to Maine Public Classical on...”

Maine Public Classical

WBQA Boothbay/Brunswick 96.7
WBQE Milbridge/Downeast 93.7
WBQF Fryeburg/Bridgton 91.7
WBSJ Frenchville/Saint John Valley 88.3
WFAS Fort Fairfield 88.7
WBEM Eastport 90.7
WBSQ Monson 91.1
W272CG Sanford/York County 102.3
W291CO Bangor 106.1
W281AC Portland 104.1
W259BY Waterville 99.7

Maine Public Classical is also available at mainepublic.org, the **Maine Public App**, and on many of the HD2 channels of Maine Public Radio.

The FCC requires stations to list their call letters and cities-of-license at the top of the hour, and because Maine Public broadcasts statewide across multiple transmitters, it is a lengthy list on our two radio services. Listeners sometimes complain about the long list in these “legal IDs” and how it interrupts our programming.

“What does the localization of signals mean for Maine?”

The immediate priority and primary benefit of localizing our signals is the capacity to localize public safety messages. This would allow critical information that citizens need to hear that is specific to their area and immediately more actionable. Additional potential benefits include the future ability to insert targeted programming, such as a local news break for a specific region, and to eliminate the lengthy reading of call signals that interrupt our programming and the listener experience.