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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 295 An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Increase Rural Maine's Access to Broadband Internet Service

Senator Breen, Representative Gattine and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee:

My name is Julie Ann Smith and I am the Executive Director of Maine Farm Bureau, the state's largest grassroots farm organization. We have represented the voice of all agriculture in Maine for the past 67 years and I am grateful to have the opportunity to serve as the voice of our members today.

Maine Farm Bureau is in strong support of expanding access to broadband, especially in rural Maine. Throughout rural Maine there is no option for coverage, or the cost of obtaining access is prohibitive.

35 years ago, the latest technology to help farmers was a fax machine. The fax machine enabled the farmers to receive and place orders immediately, correspond with customers and vendors more efficiently, and only required access to a landline phone. All farmers had access to a landline phone in large part due to the Communications Act of 1934.

Landline phone technology has been replaced by high speed internet. But the implementation of it is not as simple as having a land phone line. Many of Maine's farmers, rural businesses, and residences do not have access to this infrastructure because their physical location is too far from the three ring binder.

Farmers must rely on high speed internet infrastructure, not only for their business operations but for much of the newer farming equipment. With the relatively recent development of precision farming equipment, farmers need high speed internet to stay on par with the production capabilities of other farms throughout New England. Precision farming equipment delivers information to farmers that increases productivity, provides real-time information to allow farmers to better understand and interact with their crops and livestock, and decreases the need for farms to operate without an adequate workforce. It is urgent and necessary for high speed internet to be available throughout rural Maine, in order for Maine businesses to compete in the national and global marketplaces. Expanding high-speed broadband infrastructure will tremendously help these unserved Maine businesses.

Without the funds requested in this bond, rural Maine will continue to be underserved. Private businesses are not willing to independently invest in the

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infrastructure necessary to provide broadband internet access to sparsely populated areas, such as farming communities. They would be unable to recover the costs of such an expansion and are unable to charge those cost to the consumer without making the service too expensive. Therefore, it is necessary for the state to support the expansion of broadband infrastructure through grants, which this bond makes possible. It is imperative to provide every home, school and business in Maine with the necessary tools for success, and high speed internet is one of those tools.

Thank you for your time and service to the people of Maine. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.