



Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

55 April 2023

In support of LD 1456, An Act to Facilitate the Expansion of Broadband

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology.

My name is Rachel Dyer, and I am the associate director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council. Councils on Developmental Disabilities were created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1970. Maine's DD Council has been advocating for individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD) for over 40 years. The DD Council is a federally funded, independent organization with members from across the state, including persons with disabilities, family members, and representatives of public and private agencies which provide services and/or funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities. As required in federal law, we are involved in advocacy, capacity building and systemic change activities, with the goal that individuals with developmental and other disabilities of all ages are fully included, integrated and involved in their communities and the decisions impacting their lives.

Covid and its impact shone light on the utility of technology even as it increases the gaps experienced by Mainers who are poor, live in rural areas, and otherwise lack infrastructure and support to use it, including individuals with developmental disabilities. We have long known that people with DD are largely on the wrong side of the digital divide, lacking access to the tools that allow for online and virtual connection, due to the costs of hardware, the learning curve to understand how to use devices, and connectivity issues across the state, among other factors. While this bill does not address the many aspects of the digital divide, addressing connectivity takes an important step in acknowledging how critical access is.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.