



Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Support Of

LD 1096 - An Act to Allow Municipalities That Have Financed Fiber-optic Broadband Infrastructure to Use Loans or Grants to Repay Associated Debt

April 2, 2025

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and members of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee, my name is Rebecca Lambert, and I am providing testimony in support of LD 1096 on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association's (MMA) elected 70-member Legislative Policy Committee (LPC). For reference, MMA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit member service organization and aims to help provide policy solutions that work for all residents in Maine and the LPC guides the advocacy efforts and establishes positions on bills of municipal interest.

Many rural municipalities across the country are facing a growing demand for reliable, high-speed internet with the recent pandemic underscoring just how essential broadband access is for education, healthcare, businesses, and social connectivity. Unfortunately, for many communities, particularly rural and underserved areas, private providers have been either unwilling or unable to provide the necessary infrastructure. In response, some local governments have stepped up to meet this challenge, investing in fiber optic networks to ensure their residents have access to the fast, reliable internet they need to succeed.

However, the costs associated with building and maintaining these networks are substantial. Many municipalities have been forced to take on significant debt, albeit with local voter approval, to fund the construction of this vital infrastructure. While the long-term benefits of these networks are undeniable—namely, boosting the local economy and enhancing educational outcomes, the financial burden of paying off related debt can be overwhelming for local governments, especially when they have limited funding options and facing increasing costs that are out of their control.

Allowing municipalities to apply for funds from the Municipal Gigabit Broadband Network Access Fund and other grant opportunities to be made available through the Maine Connectivity Authority and in turn to use those funds to repay debt incurred for the construction of these fiber optic networks, is a forward-thinking solution and one appreciated by local leaders. Not only does it help local governments but also empowers communities to thrive in the connected world we live in today.

Thank you for your time and for considering the municipal perspective on this issue.

