

TOWN OF BREMEN
PO BOX 171, 208 WALDOBORO RD
BREMEN, MAINE 04551
(207) 529-5945 • FAX (207) 529-6302

Testimony of the Town of Bremen in Support of LD 657:
An Act to Modify the Law Governing Municipal General Assistance by
Designating Broadband Internet Access Service and Wireless Access Point
Technology as Basic Necessities
April 7, 2025

The Town of Bremen supports this minor modification to the state's General Assistance program to name internet as a necessity in the same manner that we treat telephone.

*Basic necessities. "Basic necessities. "Basic necessities" means food, potable water, clothing, shelter, fuel, electricity, nonelective medical services as recommended by a physician, nonprescription drugs, telephone **and internet** where it is necessary for medical reasons and any other commodity or service determined essential by the overseer in accordance with the municipality's ordinance and this chapter.*

Maine has been a leader nationally in expanding access to modern, high-speed, reliable internet infrastructure, but affordability of that essential service is still a major barrier for many Mainers. During COVID, the federal Emergency Broadband Benefit helped many people connect to affordable service so they could continue to access education, work, and healthcare. This program turned into the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which at one point had 95,000 low-income Mainers enrolled for a monthly subsidy of \$30/month off their internet bills.

The ACP ran out of funding in April 2024 and there are no concrete plans to revive this program at the federal level. The Town of Bremen had seen this coming and was able to allocate some ARPA funds to a local broadband benefit we implemented in partnership with the Maine-based non-profit National Digital Equity Center and our local internet provider, LCI Fiber. Bremen's program is the first of its kind in Maine and perhaps the nation and has helped keep 15 low-income households connected to the internet to support education, work, healthcare, and aging in place. Towns like Bremen are ready and willing to come up with local solutions like this, but we need the backing of the state to

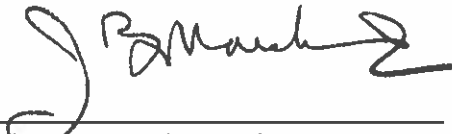
acknowledge that in today's world, internet is a necessity, and we must work to address the affordability issue for our most vulnerable residents.

This idea has support from our contacts at the Maine Broadband Coalition, Maine Municipal Association, and Maine State Welfare Directors Association. Those last two organizations are sensitive to the burdens small/rural municipalities face administering GA, and in early conversations they have agreed this would be a good edit and would not put undue stress on municipalities. It's unlikely that residents qualifying for General Assistance would expect to use that program on a monthly basis to keep connected to the internet, but we believe no low-income senior should have to make the choice between paying for heat or for internet that connects them to their doctor. We cannot say it enough: in today's world, internet is a necessity.

Regards,



Wendy Pieh, Chair



John Marsh, Selectman



Stephen Page, Selectman