



Testimony in Opposition 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”

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to LD 657.

LD 657 proposes to amend the municipal general assistance statute to classify broadband internet service and wireless access point technology as “basic necessities” eligible for public assistance. While the desire to expand digital access is understandable, this bill represents an unnecessary and concerning expansion of Maine’s welfare system.

General assistance is designed as a safety net for Mainers who cannot meet the most fundamental needs—food, shelter, heat, and medical care. The program was not intended to subsidize technologies that, while increasingly useful, are not essential for survival. Redefining “basic necessity” to include broadband services stretches the original intent of general assistance beyond recognition and sets a precedent for including other nonessential services in the future.

This proposed change also raises serious concerns about sustainability and fiscal responsibility. As municipalities across Maine struggle to meet the rising housing¹ and energy costs², mandating them to cover internet service and equipment places an additional burden on already strained local budgets. The bill provides no funding mechanism to offset these new costs, driving away funds from the true necessities that general assistance is intended to fund, and driving up expenditures when Maine should be cutting back.³

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<https://www.mainebiz.biz/article/maine-incomes-lag-rising-housing-costs-study-shows#:~:text=Housing%20Authority%20shows.-,From%202020%20to%202024%2C%20median%20home%20prices%20grew%20by%20more,%2475%2C000%20in%20total%20household%20income.>

² <https://www.maine.gov/energy/electricity-prices>

³ <https://mainemorningstar.com/2024/11/25/gov-mills-vows-lean-budget-in-light-of-projected-revenue-shortfall/>



Furthermore, internet access is already being aggressively expanded in Maine through federal and state programs, including the Maine Connectivity Authority, BEAD funds, and various federal infrastructure grants.⁴

Importantly, this bill treats all broadband access equally without acknowledging vast differences in speed, cost, and usage between service types. Would municipalities be required to pay for high-speed fiber connections or unlimited cellular data plans, and would Mainers statewide be forced to subsidize internet improvements for towns that determine only the highest-quality broadband will suffice? Without clear guidance, LD 657 opens the door to ambiguity, litigation, and uneven application across communities.

We urge lawmakers to resist the temptation to reclassify general assistance eligibility based on evolving consumer expectations. Public resources should be reserved for the indigent and directed toward life-sustaining necessities. While broadband access is increasingly important, it should not be elevated to the same level as food or heating oil in terms of priority or statutory status.

For these reasons, Maine Policy Institute urges this committee to vote “Ought Not to Pass” on LD 657. Thank you for your time and consideration.

⁴ <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-programs/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program>