



**Testimony of Island Institute in Support of LD 657: An Act to Modify the Law Governing  
Municipal General Assistance by Designating Broadband Internet ... as Basic Necessities**

April 7, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, Members of the Committee, my name is Nick Battista, and I am testifying on behalf of Island Institute in support of LD 657. Island Institute is a 42-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We boldly navigate climate and economic change with island and coastal communities to expand opportunities and deliver solutions. The “with” in our mission is essential - we collaborate and partner with Maine communities and businesses in all our work. This is particularly apparent in our work and support for the expansion of broadband services across the state. Additionally, as Chair of the ConnectMaine Authority, the State’s legacy broadband authority, I have been deeply involved in supporting the expansion of internet service across the State.

Those who live in rural Maine have known this for years and it became apparent to many more during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether enabling students to attend school remotely on a snow day, allowing for a quick check in with a doctor or other medical provider, or creating a connection to family members, friends, or other forms of social supports, internet has become a basic necessity and part of people’s daily lives well beyond its potential to support remote work or many job hunting and interviewing related activities. A minor language modification to the state’s General Assistance program to allow municipalities to name internet service as a basic necessity and therefore something that is eligible for General Assistance will help communities determine how best to support their residents in times of need.

It is also important to note here that adding internet to the list of basic necessities here does not imply that broadband should be regulated as a utility or create a mandate for increased regulation for the sector. While telephone and electricity are regulated by the PUC, food, clothing, shelter, medical services, are all areas of General Assistance that are considered basic necessities without triggering an additional regulatory burden on those industries.

Further, adding internet service to this list does not place any affirmative obligation on internet service providers to provide service without payment or to create a new connection outside of the normal process of signing up new customers. The fundamental issue here, is not whether internet service should be regulated more but rather whether it is important enough to people’s lives to add to this list. In conclusion, I urge the Committee to support LD 657. The communities in which we work will benefit from this slight language modification. Your thoughtful consideration is appreciated.