

Maine Broadband Coalition

Testimony in Opposition of LD 1975: An Act to Eliminate the ConnectMaine Authority by Repealing the Advanced Technology Infrastructure Act

October 30, 2025

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology,

My name is Joe Oliva, and I offer this testimony on behalf of the Maine Broadband Coalition in opposition to LD 1975.

The Maine Broadband Coalition represents a wide range of perspectives in Maine's broadband landscape but is fundamentally concerned with giving voice to internet users across the state to secure universal, affordable, and equitable access to broadband connectivity that serves both current and future needs.

Our opposition to LD 1975 is based on two assertions, **1.)** that the ConnectMaine Authority (CME), the ConnectMaine Fund and the Municipal Gigabit Fund are neither duplicative nor unnecessary, and **2.)** It is our belief that, particularly in reference to the funds, these are critical tools for the state to continue its work closing the digital divide for all Mainers.

We oppose passage of LD 1975 for these reasons (with further explanation below):

- Federal funding cannot solve Maine's connectivity challenges alone
 - While the historic funding through BEAD was promised to close the infrastructure and digital equity gap, turbulence in the program has clawed back hundreds of millions of dollars from Maine – and we likely won't see another program like it again.
- State funds will be vital to achieving state goals going forward
 - Though the final outcome of BEAD is underwhelming, the planning process created local and regional capacity over the past three years that *can* do the important on-the-ground work necessary to make sure Mainers can access the benefits of newly built, publicly invested networks.
- We have established needs and plans to address those needs - we need funding to make it happen
 - The ConnectMaine Fund cannot cover the extent of the state's Digital Equity Plan that garnered \$35 million in grant awards; however, it can be targeted towards high-leverage uses that allow key aspects of the plan to move forward.

Inconsistency in Federal Funding Creates a Gap

Just one year ago, we were collectively operating under the assumption that the federal funds allocated through the IJA/BEAD would arrive to support broadband deployment and digital equity initiatives as laid out in the Maine Connectivity Authority's (MCA) various submitted plans. Today, funding streams for the state's Digital Equity Plan have been cancelled, changes to BEAD have limited our ability to spend our full allocation, and nondeployment funds are in limbo. Between investments in broadband infrastructure and digital equity initiatives, what was once ~\$300 million to connect every Mainer is now ~\$50 million.

To be clear, closing Maine's digital divide did not just suddenly become \$250 million cheaper.

The ConnectMaine Fund Can Be Used to Fill That Gap

This is where the ConnectMaine Fund and Municipal Gigabit Funds can – and must– play a vital role as the only source of continuous state funding. Most importantly, the statute that dictates how the ConnectMaine Fund can be spent is broad enough to fit with the state's connectivity goals that will go unmet due to federal funding constraints.

One way that MBC would advocate for use of this funding source is to advance key aspects of the state's [Digital Equity Plan](#) – a plan that demonstrated \$35 million worth of now-terminated awards. While the ~\$2.5 million year-over-year will not cover the extent of activities and initiatives laid out in the plan, there are opportunities to leverage those funds in partnership with the network of digital equity partners that MCA has helped build over the last three years.

Funding cuts to the [Regional and Wabanaki Broadband Partners \(RWBP\) program](#), a program that funded positions in 18 regional organizations, entities, or tribes who worked directly with residents in every corner of the state, pose a significant long term challenge to the state's connectivity goals. These organizations have the critical, trust-based relationships that make the type of digital equity programming called for in the state's plan possible - without support, investment impact is blunted and communities that might otherwise have newfound access to broadband infrastructure will languish due to lack of resources that bring digital skills and safety up to a level where people feel comfortable taking the service.

In 2024 alone, RWBP provided 2,730 digital skills training to 4,639 participants; 1,990 people participated in internet safety education events; and 702 devices were distributed to those who need them. Based on a statewide survey conducted to build the Digital Equity Plan, 93% of respondents cited online safety as a major barrier to accessing the internet, and we know that Mainers lost over \$31 million to online scams in 2024, a 65% increase from nearly \$19 million in 2023.

This is just one idea! As needs evolve over time, Maine would be best served to have a flexible stream of funding that could be fit for the moment. We, as a state, have been a leader in this space since ConnectMaine was created; and, as we move closer to a post-BEAD world, can continue to be so if we continue to avail ourselves to all the tools in the toolbox. The historic federal investment of BEAD made it possible for us to plan for a world in which the digital divide is closed, but without resources like the ConnectMaine Fund, that world will be out of reach.