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**Testimony In Support of
LD 1065, “An Act to Improve the Telecommunications Relay Services Council by
Reducing Its Membership and Allowing for the Hiring of an Executive Director”
April 13, 2023**

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

My name is Benjamin Frech and I am the Senior Assistant to the Public Advocate and serve on the Telecommunications Relay Service Council of Maine. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1065, “An Act to Improve the Telecommunications Relay Services Council by Reducing Its Membership and Allowing for the Hiring of an Executive Director.”

Thank you to Senator Pierce for sponsoring LD 1065 and for presenting the amended version of the bill. The Council oversees the administration of Relay Services for the deaf, late-deafened, hard of hearing, and residents with speech impairments for the State. I have been the OPA’s appointee on the Council since December of 2021. While I cannot comment in much detail on the history of the Council before then, I am here to say that the Council has faced administrative challenges during my service. This is in no way an indictment on the members who have served as Chair during that time or a lack of commitment from anyone on the Council. As I’m sure you all can appreciate, it can be difficult to juggle public service with a full-time job. The statutory duties of the Council are considerable and are shared between the Chair, the Vice Chair, the Treasurer, and an administrative position provided by Disability Rights Maine. None of the members of the Council are compensated for their service on the Council. The hiring of an Executive Director would alleviate the burden on the aforementioned members. This position would be funded within the existing budget of the Council, so it is my understanding that this legislation would not require a fiscal note.



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The sponsor's amendment also adds a member from the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA), appointed by the president of the Authority. There are two types of relay services; digital and analog. With an increasing number of users transitioning to digital service, the Council is supportive of adding a member who can update the Council with more information regarding the expansion of broadband services.

The Telecommunications Relay Service Council of Maine ensures that people in the state who depend on relay services as an essential method of communication are provided for without an interruption the service. The Council is in agreement that this amended version of LD 1065 provides us with the tools to carry out our statutory obligations in the most efficient and beneficial way possible and the OPA hopes that the committee supports this very important piece of legislation.

Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration of this testimony. The Office of the Public Advocate looks forward to working with the Committee on LD 1065 and will be available for the work session to assist the Committee in its consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of,

William S. Harwood

William S. Harwood
Public Advocate