

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



SUPPORT

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

My name is Kiera Reardon, and I am the Interagency Broadband Manager for the Maine Connectivity Authority. Today, I 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."

As initially proposed, the bill seeks to improve an important council that serves the deaf, hard of hearing, and the late-deafened community by adding a part-time executive director and eliminating two vacant positions on the Council. The Council is composed of twelve seats, 5 of which are currently vacant, making reaching a quorum very difficult. These seats have been vacant for several years and impact the Council's ability to conduct business. The Council will benefit from adding a dedicated staff member to manage contracts and promote services to Mainers. Hiring a part-time Executive Director will provide stability and functionality to the Council as its members rotate regularly.

As amended, the bill additionally seeks to add Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) to the Council, changing the total membership from 12 to 11. As telecommunications relay services migrate fully from analog services to digital and require broadband connectivity, now is the time for this integration. MCA is working to advance digital equity: ensuring that ALL Mainers, especially those that are most impacted by the digital divide, have access to and are able to use information and communications technologies so they can fully realize all of the civic, economic, health, educational, social and other benefits that they provide. Digital equity and inclusiveness are critical components in all broadband planning and investments across Maine.

Without access to sufficient broadband, the digital divide will prevent members of the deaf community from communicating and interacting with all facets of society. Through conversations with MCA's Digital Equity Taskforce, the Broadband Action Planning process, and the Maine Broadband Coalition, it is clear that internet service providers need to be actively engaged in this arena. MCA can help by promoting relay services when meeting with ISPs and communities.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this critical issue. The Maine Connectivity Authority will be available for the work session.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Kiera Reardon'.

Maine Connectivity Authority