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THE MAINE SENATE  
131st Legislature

**Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski  
In Support of LD 1456, "An Act to Facilitate the Expansion of Broadband"**

**Before the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology  
18 April 2023**

Good afternoon Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and fellow members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology. As you know, my name is Nicole Grohoski and I am honored to represent the 22 communities of Senate District 7. I am here to present LD 1456, with an amended title, "Resolve, to Study the Effect of Current Laws and Rules on the Expansion of Broadband."

In our efforts to expand broadband to as many Mainers as possible as quickly as possible, all solutions need to be on the table. Many communities are currently engaged in their own broadband planning efforts and some have concluded that municipal broadband – which can come in different forms – is the right choice for them.

Regardless of who owns or operates internet infrastructure, the wires are almost exclusively strung on utility poles along our road rights-of-way. Attaching to poles can be challenging for entities that don't own the poles, and different owners have different protocols for how to request and secure space on their poles. A significant portion of the time and cost for a broadband project can come from planning, insuring, and executing pole attachments.

The amended version of this legislation is a study about current pole attachment laws and rules by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) in consultation with the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA). It focuses on how these regulations affect municipal broadband expansion through either public or public-private networks. Specifically, the study must review: 1) wait times for the approval of pole attachments, 2) compliance with requirements that common space on poles be preserved, and 3) PUC enforcement of pole relocation or removal requirements.

The PUC and MCA would collect information about commonly-experienced challenges related to pole attachments and present possible solutions for this committee to consider. Because these challenges are not only experienced by municipal broadband projects, but also privately-

developed projects, I would be amenable to expanding the scope of the study. It would be interesting to know if pole owners are treating all would-be attachers similarly.

This study builds on the work of this committee in previous Legislatures, and unfortunately, it appears that our work is not yet done. Projects are still being delayed by long approval processes and delayed make-ready work. Poles are still abandoned in rights-of-way, sometimes obstructing sidewalks or impeding construction projects. I think our efforts have helped somewhat, so the goal of this study is to see what remains to be done.

Thank you for your attention and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.