

**Maine Public Testimony to
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
In Support of LD 450
*An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Upgrade and Replace Emergency Alert System
Infrastructure of Maine Public***

**Rick Schneider, President & CEO of Maine Public
April 25, 2023**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Rick Schneider, President and CEO of Maine Public, and I am speaking in support of LD 450. I am grateful to Senator Pierce for sponsoring, and to the eight bipartisan legislators for co-sponsoring this proposal.

I am here on behalf of the nearly one million Mainers we touch weekly, through our nine television transmitters and 14 FM radio stations. Every day, we provide news, weather, educational content, and information that connects Mainers statewide.

The most important part of our partnership with state government is our role in public safety and emergency communications. Maine Public works with the Maine Emergency Management Agency – MEMA – to coordinate the Emergency Alert System.

The best recent example of using this network in an emergency was during the pandemic, when we quickly adapted to coordinating Dr. Shah’s daily briefings. Our crew worked with the Maine CDC to produce and broadcast those briefings on radio, television, and online streaming.

As you see from the handout, our transmission network is extensive, from Sanford to St. Francis, Mars Hill, and Calais. The towers, transmitters, and microwave links spread across nearly 30 sites that must be on the air at all times.

Our network of towers and transmitters was built in the 1960s and requires modernization and replacement. More than 10 years ago we created a plan with an estimated price tag of \$20 million to accomplish that task and began pursuing state funding support. In 2021, we were allocated \$10 million through the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan. That \$10 million is helping with significant modernization, including replacing our two primary television transmitters. However, it is only a partial fix and the overall cost has grown.

What was a \$20 million project more than a decade ago has grown to \$27 million – with \$17 million outstanding after the 2021 allocation. Our \$17 million request through this bill is structured as a bond issue because that is the typical way to support infrastructure. But if there is the opportunity to direct one-time support as you did in 2021, that would also be a welcome and efficient way to accomplish the goals of LD 450.

It is helpful to understand that Maine Public is unusual among public television statewide networks nationwide, many of which are state agencies. In 1992, the University of Maine’s public broadcasting network merged with Channel 10, founded by Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin colleges, to create the independent nonprofit we now know as Maine Public. 75% of our budget comes from private sector

fundraising, which pays for the programs and services we provide. But because of this structure, Maine Public, unlike most other state networks, doesn't have access to regular capital replacement funds.

The towers, transmitters, antennas, and microwave links are the essential backbone of the network. They are infrastructure that the public doesn't see but are essential to providing reliable service to the state.

We saw during the pandemic how valuable it is to have a reliable statewide communication system. This one-time request for support is a strategic investment that future generations can rely on for emergency information, public safety, educational content, and information.

We are available for any questions. Thank you for your time and attention.