



Matthew A. Harrington
Senator, District 33

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
LD 2193, "An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Wireless Communications by Allowing the
Public Utilities Commission to Designate Eligible Telecommunications Carriers"
February 13, 2024

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler and members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, I am Senator Matthew Harrington, and I have the honor of serving the communities of Waterboro, Alfred, Lebanon and Sanford. I am pleased to sponsor LD 2193, "An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Wireless Communications by Allowing the Public Utilities Commission to Designate Eligible Telecommunications Carriers."

This proposal would return jurisdictional authority over certain wireless communications to Maine. This means that Maine's Public Service Commission will have authority to approve the qualified new Lifeline providers, making it so that more Mainers that are eligible can: have access to affordable broadband which can be used to find and/or maintain employment, have enhanced access to remote and virtual educational opportunities, have improved access to 911 dispatch services and other emergency responders, have better affordable access to reach a healthcare provider, for example, through telemedicine to help them stay out of the ER for primary care, and more.

The best part is that these great outcomes can be achieved without any state money. The federal Universal Service Fund (USF) fee from monthly cell phone bills funds this program. Having more Lifeline providers in Maine will enable more Mainers to have affordable access to these services and it will complement the current broadband infrastructure build out, the federal Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program, to help deliver affordable telecommunications service to more low-income Mainers.

Maine is one of only six states that does not have this authority in statute. That is because we have not passed legislation like this. Maine and five other states deferred this authority to the Federal Communications Commission many years ago. For 12 years, the FCC has failed to consider requests to add any new companies in our state to become authorized telecommunications providers to serve low-income citizens under the Lifeline program.

Two years ago, three states, Alabama, Tennessee, and Virginia unanimously enacted similar laws to reclaim this authority from the FCC. Right now, Florida and North Carolina have legislation pending. The FCC will not weigh in to oppose the legislation because federal law specifically allows Maine this authority, if we desire. The Maine PUC should use its full authority to utilize these federal dollars and increase service providers in Maine. Only 11% of eligible Mainers who could be using this federal program actually are. The lower income citizens in our state will benefit by having better affordable access to wireless and broadband services. It is time we take this authority back and improve wireless communications for our residents.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I would be happy to answer any questions.