

Testimony in Support of L.D. 1235 An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Connect Maine with a World-class Internet Infrastructure

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, Members of the Committee, my name is Mia Purcell and I support LD 1235. I represent Maine West, a partnership of local and regional organizations dedicated to addressing systemic rural challenges and enhancing community well-being in western Maine through increased collaboration across the economic, education, health, and conservation sectors. The Maine West region includes the Bethel, Rumford-Mexico, and Oxford Hills areas in Oxford County.

Maine West made high speed internet access and adoption a priority several years ago, recognizing that it is fundamental to making rural communities viable and attractive places to live and work. In 2018 Maine West initiated a regional broadband planning process with the support of a ConnectMaine planning grant. The effects of the coronavirus pandemic have only intensified demand for universal access to serve the needs of students, health providers, towns, and businesses. Last summer Maine West partners introduced the Broadband Boot Camp which provided technical assistance to emerging local broadband committees seeking to improve high-speed internet access and adoption in 12 Maine West and Oxford County communities. In less than a year these communities have formed a broadband committee, surveyed their residents regarding their broadband needs, gathered internet speed test data from their residents, and are evaluating different solutions for expanding high-speed internet service and funding resources to cover the cost. For many of these communities, especially the smaller ones, the costs associated with implementation are daunting, running in the millions of dollars. LD 1235 offers an important funding resource to help these and other Maine communities that have made improving broadband and internet connectivity for their residents a priority. Please vote “ought to pass” to LD 1235.

Mia Purcell, Maine West Partner and co-facilitator of the Maine West Broadband Boot Camp