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**Testimony of Rep. Seth Berry
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
In Support of L.D. 1484, "An Act To Enhance the ConnectMaine Authority's
Capacity To Provide World-class Internet"**

Senator Lawrence and fellow members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee, my name is Seth Berry and I represent House District 55: Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, most of Richmond and Swan Island on the Kennebec. I'm pleased to write as a cosponsor of L.D. 1484, "An Act To Enhance the ConnectMaine Authority's Capacity To Provide World-class Internet."

It is hard to add to the words spoken today by Governor Mills and Senator Bennett. As one of the four co-chairs of the Legislative Broadband Caucus, I know we are all incredibly grateful for their leadership.

For me, this journey began when I was elected in 2006. I first served on this committee, under its previous name in the 123rd, when we created the Connect Maine Authority the following year. Since then, Connect Maine has done a lot of good with its enormous staff of two individuals. It is remarkable to me that until this year, we had put less than a dollar per Mainer per year towards its funding.

Today, we know that broadband is imperative. It is imperative for our businesses and their workers, for our teachers and students, for rural doctors and their patients. It is imperative for our clean energy and climate goals, for our farmers, for our realtors. It is imperative for all of Maine, if we hope to realize our potential.

Some Mainers alive today remember 1935. At that time, only one in ten farmers could access electricity from the grid. It was FDR's Rural Electrification Administration that brought electricity to the American countryside.

The REA brought public-sector, low-cost-capital to rural communities organizing their own, electric cooperatives. This step cut in half the cost to make electricity universal. Utilities had been charging \$1,500 to \$2,000 for each new mile of power line constructed. Within four years, REA borrowers were building lines for less than \$825 per mile.

This is the power of low-cost capital, combined with a muscular, mission-driven agency that is determined to extend essential services to all. This is the potential of the MCA we envision here today.

Thanks to the REA, Maine was fully electrified. Last to light up was the 77-town area now served by the Eastern Maine Electricity Cooperative, extending from Patten to Perry and from Wesley to Wypitlock. Today in some of these same communities, the Downeast Broadband Utility is delivering full fiber to every home and business. In the Katahdin region, a similar effort is underway.

These efforts are powered by remarkable community volunteers who have decided they can not wait, and will not wait. By supporting our rural communities and by working closely with private and public partners, the MCA can do for broadband what the REA did for electricity.

Fully funded and ably led, the MCA may one day be seen as a giant leap for Maine-kind, connecting us to jobs, to learning, to health care, and to one other.

Thanks to President Biden and Congress, to Governor Mills and Senator Bennett, today we glimpse a more connected and prosperous future for Maine.

I look forward to working together with them, and with this committee, to refine and pass this important legislation.

Thank you for listening. I would be happy to answer any questions.